

The two-part Book of Kings, which approaches history from a theological point of view, relates the story of the ancient monarchies of Israel and Judah. Here, the focus is on an event in the reign of King Jehohaz in the northern kingdom of Israel. Samaria, the capital city, is under siege by an army from the kingdom of Aram (Syria) to the north.

The sidrah deals with the treatment of skin diseases (often rendered in English as "leprosy"), and the haftarah tells the tale of four lepers and their role at the end of the siege.

7:3] At the entrance to the gate were four men, all lepers. They said to one another, "Why should we sit here until we die? 4] If we decide to go into the city, we will die of the famine; and if we remain here, we will die as well; better to desert to the Aramean camp: if they let us live, we will live; if they put us to death, we will be dead!"

5] At twilight they made their way toward the Aramean camp. When they reached the edge of the camp, they found not a soul. 6] The Eternal had caused the Arameans to hear the sounds of horses and chariots, the sounds of a large army, so they had thought: *The king of Israel must have paid the kings of the Hittites and of Egypt to attack us!* 7] And they had run away at twilight: leaving their tents, their horses, their mules, everything in their camp, just as it was, they had fled for their lives.

8] These lepers came to the edge of the camp, went into one tent, and ate and drank. They carried off some silver, some gold and clothing, and went and hid it; then they came back, entered another tent, took what they could find there, and hid it. 9] Then they said to one another, "We're not doing right. This is a red-letter day, and we are keeping

7:3-4] The term מְצֹרָע (m'tzora) can refer to having either temporary or chronic, degenerative skin ailments; here, the men's fatalistic attitude shows that they were considered to have true leprosy (Han-

מְצֹרָעִים פָּתַח
הַשַּׁעַר וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ מָה אֲנַחְנוּ
לְשָׁבִים פֹּה עַד-מָתְנוּ: 4 אִם-אֲמַרְנוּ נָבוֹא
הָעִיר וְהָרַעַב בָּעִיר וּמָתְנוּ שָׁם וְאִם-
יִשְׁבְּנוּ פֹה וּמָתְנוּ וְעַתָּה לָבוֹ וּנְפֹלֶה אֶל-
מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם אִם-יְחַיֵּנוּ נְחַיֶּה וְאִם-יָמִיתְנוּ
וּמָתְנוּ:

5 וַיָּקָמוּ בְּצֶשֶׁף לָבוֹא אֶל-מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם וַיָּבֹאוּ
עַד-קִצֵּה מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם וְהִנֵּה אִין-שָׁם אִישׁ:
6 וְאֲדָנָי הַשָּׁמַיִם | אֶת-מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם קוֹל לְכַב
קוֹל טוֹס קוֹל חֵיל גְּדוֹל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-
אָחִיו הִנֵּה שָׁכַר-עָלֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-
מַלְכֵי הַחַתִּיִּים וְאֶת-מַלְכֵי מִצְרַיִם לָבוֹא
עָלֵינוּ: 7 וַיִּקְוֹמוּ וַיָּנוּסוּ בְּצֶשֶׁף וַיַּעֲזְבוּ אֶת-
אֹהֲלֵיהֶם וְאֶת-סוּסֵיהֶם וְאֶת-חֲמֹרֵיהֶם

8 הַמַּחֲנֵה כַּאֲשֶׁר-הָיָא וַיָּנוּסוּ אֶל-נַפְשָׁם:
9 וַיָּבֹאוּ הַמְצֹרָעִים הָאֵלֶּה עַד-קִצֵּה
הַמַּחֲנֵה וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-אֹהֶל אֶחָד וַיֹּאכְלוּ
וַיִּשְׂתּוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וּבְגָדִים
וַיִּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ וַיָּשָׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-אֹהֶל אֶחָד
וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם וַיִּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ: 9 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ
אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ לֹא-כֵן | אֲנַחְנוּ עֹשִׂים הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

sen's disease, thought to be highly contagious) and therefore permanently excluded from contact with the rest of the Israelite population. They had little to lose by going over to the Arameans.

מצרע

Second Kings

7: 3-20

Part 1

Part 2

quiet about it. If we wait till daybreak, we will pay for it; we had better go now and let the king's household know what has happened."

10] They went and called to the gatekeepers of the city and told them that they had come to the Aramean camp and found no one there, not a single human voice, only tethered horses and mules, and tents left as is. 11] The gatekeepers called out, and the news was passed on into the inner court of the palace. 12] The king rose up in the night and said to his officials, "I'll tell you what the Arameans are doing to us: they know that we're starving, so they've hidden in the fields, saying, 'They [Israel] will go out of the city, and then we can take them alive, and march into the city!'" 13] One of his officials answered, saying, "Let some of the remaining horses be taken—they are [but few] like the remainder—[few, alas] like the remainder of the multitude of Israel that has perished. So let us send [the horses] and see."

14] So they took two mounted riders, and the king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, "Go reconnoiter!" 15] They followed the [Aramean] trail as far as the [river] Jordan; all along the way there were clothes and weapons that the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. The scouts returned and told the king. 16] Then the people went out and looted the Aramean camp. So it came about that a bushel of the best flour was sold for [only] a shekel and two bushels of barley cost [only] a shekel, just as the Eternal had promised.

10] *Called.* From afar, for their leprosy prevented them from coming too near.

Gatekeepers. The Hebrew, a collective, looks like a singular noun but commands a plural verb.

11] *Gatekeepers.* Here, it's the reverse of the previous verse: the noun is plural; the verb is singular.

13] This verse is considered by most scholars to be repetitious and corrupted. Our translation has rendered it by adding explanatory brackets, without emending the text.

יּוֹם-בִּשְׂרָהּ הוּא וַאֲנַחְנוּ מִחֹשִׁים וְחַפְּיוֹ
עַד-אֹר הַבֶּקֶר וּמִצְאָנוּ עֹוֹן וְעַתָּה לְכוּ
וּנְבֹאָה וְנִגְיֶדָה בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ:

10 וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל-שַׁעַר הָעִיר וַיִּגְיֶדוּ
לָהֶם לֵאמֹר בָּאוּ אֵל-מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם וְהִנֵּה
אִין-שָׁם אִישׁ וְקוֹל אָדָם כִּי אִם-הִסּוֹס
אֶסוּר וְהַחֲמֹר אֶסוּר וְאֵהֱלִים כַּאֲשֶׁר-
הִמָּחָה: 11 וַיִּקְרָא הַשְּׁעָרִים וַיִּגְיֶדוּ בֵּית
הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּנִימָה: 12 וַיִּקֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל-עֲבָדָיו אֲגִידֶה-נָּא לָכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ
לָנוּ אֲרָם יָדְעוּ כִּי-רַעֲבִים אֲנַחְנוּ וַיֵּצְאוּ מִן-
הַמַּחֲנֶה לְהַחֲבֹה בַּשָּׂדֶה לֵאמֹר כִּי-
יֵצְאוּ מִן-הָעִיר וְנִתְפָּשׂוּ חַיִּים וְאֶל-הָעִיר
נָבֵא: 13 וַיַּעַן אֶחָד מֵעֲבָדָיו וַיֹּאמֶר וַיִּקְחוּ-
נָא חֲמִשָּׁה מִן-הִסּוֹסִים הַנִּשְׁאָרִים אֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁאָרוּ-בָּהּ הַנֹּסִים כְּכֹל-הַחֲמֹן הַמֶּזֶן וְיִשְׂרְאֵל
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאָרוּ-בָּהּ הַנֹּסִים כְּכֹל-הַמֶּזֶן וְיִשְׂרְאֵל

אֲשֶׁר-תָּמוּ וְנִשְׁלַחַה וְנִרְאָה:
14 וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי רֶכֶב סוּסִים וַיִּשְׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶחָדִי מַחֲנֵה-אֲרָם לֵאמֹר לְכוּ וּרְאוּ:
15 וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם עַד-הַיַּרְדֵּן וְהִנֵּה כָל-
הַדֶּרֶךְ מְלֵאָה בְּגֵדִים וּבְלֵים אֲשֶׁר-הִשְׁלִיכוּ
אֲרָם בַּחֲפֹז בְּחַפְזָם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ הַמְּלֹאָכִים
וַיִּגְדוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ: 16 וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶת מַחֲנֵה
אֲרָם וַיְהִי סֵאֵה-טֹלֶת בְּשֶׁקֶל וְסֵאֵתִים
שְׁעָרִים בְּשֶׁקֶל כְּדָבָר יְהוָה:

Some. Literally, "five," which functions here as an indefinite number.

16] *As the Eternal had promised.* In the passage just prior to this haftarah selection, Elisha says: "Thus says the Eternal: This time tomorrow, a bushel of the best flour shall sell for a shekel at the gate of Samaria, and two bushels of barley for a shekel" (7:1; repeated below, v. 18). The plummeting prices signaled an end to the extreme scarcity of food that had been caused by famine and siege.

Best flour. Others, "choice flour"; see at Lev. 2:2.