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Alastair Roberts

Jehu stages his coup. Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Kings 9 1 So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth-Gilead. And when he came, behold, the commanders of the army were in council. 2 And he said, I have a word for you, O commander.

And Jehu said, To which of us all? And he said, To you, O commander. 3 So he arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the Lord, over Israel.

4 And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord. 5 For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. 6 And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Beasha the son of Ahijah.

7 And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her. 8 Then he opened the door and fled. When Jehu came out to the servants of his master, they said to him, Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you? 9 And he said to them, You know the fellow and his talk? 10 And they said, That is not true, tell us now.

11 And he said, Thus and so he spoke to me, saying, Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel. 12 Then in haste every man of them took his garment, and put it under him on the bare steps. 13 And they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, Jehu is king.

Thus Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. Now Joram with all Israel had been on guard at Ramath-gilead against Hazeol king of Syria. But King Joram had returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazeol king of Syria.

So Jehu said, If this is your decision, then let no one slip out of the city to go and tell the news in Jezreel. Then Jehu mounted his chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to visit Joram.

Now the watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came and said, I see a company. And Joram said, Take a horseman and send to meet them, and let them say, Is it peace? So a man on horseback went to meet him and said, Thus says the king, Is it peace? And Jehu said, What do you have to do with peace? Turn around and ride behind me. And the watchman reported, saying, The messenger reached them, but he is not coming back.

Then he sent out a second horseman, who came to them and said, Thus the king has said, Is it peace? And Jehu answered, What do you have to do with peace? Turn around and ride behind me. Again the watchman reported, He reached them, but he is not coming back, and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously. Joram said, Make ready.

And they made ready his chariot. Then Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah set out, each in his chariot, and went to meet Jehu, and met him at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, Is it peace, Jehu? He answered, What peace can there be so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many? Then Joram reigned about and fled, saying to Ahaziah, Treachery, O Ahaziah! And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot.

Jehu said to Bidkar his aid, Take him up, and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. For remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the Lord made this pronouncement against him, as surely as I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the Lord, I will repay you on this plot of ground. Now therefore, take him up, and throw him on the plot of

ground, in accordance with the word of the Lord.

When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-hagan. And Jehu pursued him, and said, Shoot him also. And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Ger, which is by Ibliam.

And he fled to Megiddo, and died there. His servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in the tomb with his fathers in the city of David. In the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah began to reign over Judah.

When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked out of the window. And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, Is it peace to you Zimri, murderer of your master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? Who? Two or three of the eunuchs looked out at him. He said, Throw her down.

So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered on the wall, and on the horses, and they trampled on her. Then he went in and ate and drank. And he said, See now to this cursed woman, and bury her, for she is a king's daughter.

But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. When they came back and told him, he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite. In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.

At the beginning of 2 Kings chapter 9 we find Israel still engaged in battle at Ramoth-gil, against the Syrians. Joram or Jehoram of Israel has been injured in battle and returned to Jezreel to recover. However the army remains at Ramoth-gil, which is where the story picks up now.

In 1 Kings chapter 19 verses 15-18, after Elijah went to Mount Horeb, the Lord had spoken to him and had given him a mission. And the Lord said to him, Go return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you arrive you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death.

Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him. However, surprisingly, after anointing Elisha as his successor at the end of the chapter, nothing more happened. It had seemed for a moment as if Israel was about to face its great reckoning, but it didn't materialise.

Elijah ascended into heaven in 2 Kings chapter 2, Elisha took his place and went around

mostly healing, delivering and performing miracles. The forgetful reader of the books of Kings will probably have forgotten 1 Kings chapter 19 already at this point, and the more attentive might have puzzled about what was going on. The prophetic commission had not been abandoned though, it awaited the proper time, the remnant had to be formed first through the ministry of Elisha before the time for judgement came.

In 2 Kings chapter 8 Hazael had been anointed king of Syria, and at the end of the chapter was causing trouble on the northern border of the Transjordan in Ramoth-Gilead. Ramoth-Gilead was the same place where Jehoshaphat and Ahab had fought unsuccessfully in 1 Kings chapter 22. Ahab had been fatally wounded in that battle and had died in a manner that fulfilled the prophecy that Elijah had given in the preceding chapter after Ahab's sin in killing Naboth and taking his vineyard.

In verses 34-38 And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until that evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot. And about sunset a cry went through the army, every man to his city, and every man to his country.

So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria, and they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken. The preceding chapter should have given us a sense of *déjà vu*.

Once again a battle with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead. Once again an alliance of the king of Israel and the king of Judah. Once again the Lord turning the conflict against his people.

Once again the Israelite king wounded by the Syrians in battle. Then the wounded king returned to Jezreel. At this point we should have a sense of where the story is going.

In Elijah's prophecy to Ahab in Naboth's vineyard, the Lord had pronounced judgment upon Ahab and upon his house. In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick up your own blood. The dogs had licked up the blood of Ahab in chapter 22, but not in Jezreel where Naboth had been killed.

And there was more to the prophecy. In chapter 21 verses 21 to 24, Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel.

And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Beasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me. And because you have made Israel to sin, and of Jezebel the Lord also said, The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat.

And anyone of his who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat. Ahaziah the son of Ahab had died shortly afterwards in 2 Kings chapter 1, with his brother Jehoram or Joram becoming king in his place. Now, eight chapters later, we are finally going to see the prophecy come to pass.

Beyond anointing Elisha as his successor, setting the ball in motion, Elijah had not personally fulfilled any of the further elements of his vocation. In the previous chapter, Elisha had anointed Hazeiel. In chapter 9, Elisha commissions another prophet to do the anointing.

Perhaps his presence in Ramoth Gilead as a famous prophet would have drawn unwanted attention to his mission, compromising it. The young man of the sons of the prophets was commissioned to anoint Jehu secretly, taking him into an inner chamber in order to do so. Jehu is seemingly the only king in Israel to have been anointed in such a manner.

Peter Lighthouse notes that anointing by a prophet or priest is not that common in the books of the kings, and that only three main kings are anointed – Solomon, Joash and Jehu. Jehu is the only anointed king of Israel. Like the two other figures, he might be seen as one who foreshadows the advent of the Messiah.

Solomon builds the temple, Jehu cleanses the temple, and Joash will reform the temple. However, Jehu also recalls the figure of Saul in some unsettling ways. Jehu is anointed as a minister of the Lord's vengeance upon the house of Ahab.

Former dynasties such as Jeroboams and Baashas had been cut off, but they had been cut off in the Lord's providential judgement by the conspiracies of Baasha and Zimri, respectively. Neither of these two figures was anointed by the Lord for the task. The Lord did not merely anoint Jehu as king, he also commissioned him to strike down Ahab's house, promising to make Ahab's house, the dynasty of the Omrides, like the dynasties of Jeroboam and Baasha that had preceded it.

And Jezebel, Ahab's queen, who still lived, would suffer a gruesome fate. This would avenge the blood of the prophets that Ahab and Jezebel had slain upon Ahab's house. The anointing of Jehu occurs secretly, behind closed doors, with Jehu and the prophet alone, and once Jehu had been anointed, the prophet fled.

When Jehu left the inner room and came out to the other commanders of the army, they asked him what the prophet had come to him for. Jehu initially tried to dismiss the issue, speaking of the prophet as if he were a madman. However, the other commanders knew that something more was going on and they pressed him on the matter.

He then revealed to them the message that he had been given, and they immediately rushed to confirm the message, that he would be the king. As in the triumphal entry in

the Gospels, the men removed their garments and placed them in front of him on the steps and blew the trumpet, declaring him to be the king. This is not the regular form of an announcement that would accompany a typical king in the line of succession.

It is the sort of statement that comes with a coup. Jehu instructed his men to prevent anyone from leaving Ramoth-Gilead to warn the king in Jezreel. He wants to strike Joram and Jezebel when they are unprepared.

Jehu mounts his chariot, leads a great company behind him and races towards Jezreel. A tense scene is set up as we alternate between this approaching army and the watchman on the tower of Jezreel. He sees the company approaching, informs the king and the king sends out a horseman to meet them.

The messenger comes to Jehu and Jehu tells him that he has nothing to do with peace as a servant of Jehoram. He instructs the man to join him. A second horseman is sent out and the same thing happens.

The watchman then recognizes the approaching man as Jehu, the son of Nimshi. He is driving furiously or madly, a related word to the way that the prophet is described earlier on as a madman. The mad zeal of the prophet has been communicated to Jehu the commander and now he is coming to avenge the blood of the Lord's prophets upon the house of Ahab.

Joram readies his chariot and with him comes Ahaziah the king of Judah. Now that the approaching man has been recognized as Jehu, Joram likely presumes that he comes with a message that he can only deliver to Joram in person. So to get the message as soon as possible he goes out to meet him.

He asks the same question, is it peace? Jehu's answer makes clear that there will be no peace. It is the sins of Jezebel that he particularly emphasizes. Not only had she slain the Lord's prophets, she had also led the people in idolatry.

They meet Jehu at an ominous location, in the property of Naboth the Jezreelite, the very place where the blood of Ahab was going to be spilled. Jehu at this point draws his bow and shoots Joram between the shoulders. Joram will die in much the same way as his father Ahab.

Jehu at this point declares that this is the fulfillment of the message of the Lord through Elijah the Tishbite. This was the judgment that had been foretold, the blood of Ahab and his son is being shed at this particular place. We also learn here that it was not just the blood of Naboth that was slain, but also the blood of his sons.

Naboth and his sons were killed, and now Ahab and his sons will be killed in vengeance. Joram's body is thrown upon the plot of land. And Ahaziah is then pursued also.

Ahaziah we must remember is also a descendant of Ahab. He is the nephew of Jehoram, the son of Jehoram's sister Athaliah, who is the daughter of Ahab. This is a judgment coming upon both of the nations, both Israel and Judah.

They become mirror images of each other. They both walk in the ways of the kings of Israel, in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and they both die together as a result. Hearing that Jehu is approaching, and knowing his intentions, Jezebel paints her eyes and adorns her head.

If she's going to die, she's going to die like a queen. She looks out of the window, and as Jehu approaches, she refers to him as Zimri, murderer of your master. Zimri brought down the dynasty of Beasha, but his coup was short-lived and ill-fated.

After seven days, he committed suicide within his palace. By associating Jehu with Zimri, Jezebel is suggesting that his coup will be equally unsuccessful, and perhaps also that the Amrites will get the supremacy again, just as they first gained the throne of Israel in the unrest introduced after Zimri killed Elah. Jezebel's son Ahaziah had died in consequence of falling through a lattice in Naperum, and now Jezebel dies as she is thrown through a window by three eunuchs.

The horses trample on her, and her blood is spattered on the wall and on the horses, and then Jehu goes in and eats and drinks. Lighthouse suggests the possibility of some sort of sacrificial illusion here. The eating and drinking is a fellowship meal that can result after the blood of Ahab's house has been shed, and it has been sprinkled like sacrificial blood on the walls to purge the sins of the house of Israel.

The spattering of the blood of the woman against the wall might also remind us of the use of the expression, whoever pisses against the wall in the case of men who are doomed to judgment. Lissa Rae Beale suggests that the spattering of the woman's blood may be the female counterpart. After they have eaten and drunk, they go outside to see if they can bury the body.

Jezebel was the daughter of a Sidonian king, and the wife of a king of Israel, so she should be accorded a proper burial. However, according to the word of the Lord, the body had been consumed almost entirely by the dogs. This fulfilled the judgment prophecy of Elijah concerning the punishment for the killing of Naboth.

The gruesome account of Jezebel's demise is concluded with the statement that her corpse will be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel. This might be a play upon her name, with the concluding three consonants relating to a word for dung. A question to consider, reading the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, what comparisons and contrasts can we see with the story of Jehu? Third John The Elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you, and that you may be in good health as it goes well with your soul.

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church.

You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God, for they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth. I have written something to the church, but Diatrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to, and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate evil, but imitate good.

Whoever does good is from God. Whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself.

We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends each by name.

Third John is the shortest book in the Bible. Luke Timothy Johnson has suggested that the three epistles of John were sent at the same time by the hand of Demetrius. Third John recommends Demetrius to Gaius in verse 12, and Second John was intended to be publicly read in Gaius' church.

Perhaps this is the letter that was written to the church, referred to in verse 9 of this book. First John is less of a letter than a homily, exhorting the members of Gaius' church. Third John is very unusually for New Testament epistles, a private correspondence, addressed to Gaius alone, not immediately intended to be shared with a wider audience.

Of the Johanne epistles, it is the only one to contain names, Gaius, Diotrophes, and Demetrius. We don't know anything about the addressee of this epistle, Gaius. As Gaius was a common name, it is unlikely that the various references that we see to figures named Gaius in the New Testament are references to this same individual.

There are likely at least three or four individuals called Gaius in the New Testament. There was a Gaius in Corinth, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1.14, who may have been the host of Paul, mentioned in Romans 16.23. There are probably a couple of other different Gaiuses in the Book of Acts, a Gaius in Macedonia in Acts 19.29 and a Gaius in Derbe in Acts 20.4. Many scholars have suggested that John's epistles were written in the context of Ephesus in Asia. The letters that begin the Book of Revelation are also addressed to

churches in that geographical region.

If this were the case, it would weigh the identification of Gaius away from the Corinthian and Macedonian Gaiuses, for instance. Gaius may have been the overseer of a church under John's more general regional oversight, or perhaps he was simply a fellow minister in the region, of a church where John had formerly ministered. What we do know is that Gaius is dear to John in the Gospel.

John loves Gaius in the truth, which might simply refer to a love that is true, but likely has a thicker meaning than that, relating to the way that John loves Gaius in a manner thoroughly shaped and contextualised by the truth of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John has often been spoken of as the Apostle of Love. As Robert Yarborough notes, this title is well deserved, not merely for the extensive character of John's teaching concerning love, or the peculiarly close relationship that he has with our Lord in the fourth Gospel, as the disciple that Jesus loved, but also for the way in which John articulates the loving warmth of the bonds between Christians in places such as this, the beloved Gaius whom I love in truth.

John expresses his prayer for Gaius, that he would materially prosper and would know good health as things go well with his life or with his soul. Presumably John is wishing that Gaius would know material well-being that corresponds to the spiritual well-being and progress that he is showing. It appears that believers who had visited Gaius' church had visited John on a number of occasions, bringing with them positive reports about the well-being and growth of Gaius and the believers in his congregation.

These were most likely travelling missionaries, who had been given hospitality by Gaius while they were there. Some of the visitors to whom John refers may have been those to whom John referred in 2 John verse 4, or who brought him reports of this matter. I rejoice greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

It is a cause of great encouragement to John to hear of the spiritual progress of persons under his spiritual oversight, or persons for whom he was instrumental in their coming to faith. Indeed for John there are no joys that really can compare with this joy. The life of the faithful Christian minister is tied up with those under his oversight, in ways that can exceed even that of the relationship between a parent and their natural child.

John highly commends Gaius on his faithful performance of his ministry, of which the brothers who had visited had given him a report. The brothers seemed to have been strangers to Gaius, rather than members of his church. They had benefited from Gaius's generous hospitality, and had reported upon Gaius's faithfulness and love to the entirety of John's congregation.

The showing of hospitality would have been a very important part of the life of the early

church. They were in a pioneer situation, with many workers travelling to and fro, developing the connective tissue between congregations within and across different regions, sharing gifts, bringing news from place to place, strengthening churches that were very young in the faith, and planting new congregations. In such a situation generous hospitality, in the provision of shelter and support, was one of the things that kept the spiritual supply lines of the early church open.

It allowed for gifts and ministers of the church to be communicated effectively to those places where they were most needed. Such hospitality shone to the messengers of Christ is often highlighted in its importance in the New Testament, not least in the parable of the sheep and the goats. It is possible that the persons who brought these reports about Gaius and his church were going to be passing through Gaius's city again on the return leg of their journey.

However, John's encouragement to welcome, hospitality, and support of travelling ministers may have been a more generic one concerning future visitors of such a type. The travellers in question, most likely travelling missionaries as we have seen, have gone out on their missions for the sake of Jesus' name, and have not accepted support from the unbelievers. John here uses a word that is commonly translated as Gentiles, but which differs from the word commonly used for Gentiles, being found only here and in Matthew's Gospel, where it refers to those outside of the community of faith.

By accepting nothing from the unbelievers, such missionaries depended upon the Lord and maintained the integrity of their mission, which might otherwise have been compromised if they had been teachers for pay, for instance. Supporting such persons is important, as it enables people like John, Gaius, and the travelling missionaries all to perform their particular vocations as fellow workers for the truth. Verse 9, which refers to something that John had written to the church, most likely refers to the book of 2 John, which probably accompanied this private letter.

However, there is a figure, seemingly a member of Gaius's congregation, or otherwise under his oversight, who is resistant to the authority of John, and perhaps also Gaius and the other Christian teachers as well. Maybe there is a personal dispute between John and Diotrephes, or perhaps Diotrephes is someone who will refuse to accept the teaching of 1 and 2 John. Whatever is the case, Diotrephes is characterised by a desire to put himself first.

Jesus had taught his disciples in Mark chapter 9 verse 35, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all, and in Mark chapter 10 verses 42-45 we read, And Jesus called them to him and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the

Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

By the description of Diotrephes here, he is someone who rejects this ethos, being driven by ambition and a desire for dominance. Beyond not acknowledging the authority of persons such as John and Gaius within his context, he also bad-mouths them, spreading discontent that undermines them. He refuses to welcome travelling missionaries, and also opposes those within the church who would try to do so, to the extent of excluding them from the congregation.

By refusing such hospitality, Diotrephes would have made it very hard for ministers to operate in his context. Alistair Stuart, in his work *The Original Bishops*, suggests that it is quite likely that Diotrephes was a wealthier member of the congregation who owned the house in which others met. By virtue of the fact that the early churches largely met in private houses, a person who owned a larger house in which others met, and in which travelling ministers could be hosted, would enjoy a lot of influence, even beyond that which their greater power of wealth and social status would have given them.

John says that when he visits, he will address these matters with Diotrephes. People will be known by their fruits. People whose lives are marked by evil have not seen God, whereas those whose lives are characterised by doing good are from God.

These are the people that must be imitated. Gaius is encouraged to consider the people with whom he associates and the people that he will imitate. While dealings with someone like Diotrephes may be unavoidable for him, he must recognise what someone like Diotrephes represents, over against the faithfulness of the travelling missionaries and Demetrius.

John proceeds to praise Demetrius, adding his testimony to that of many others that Demetrius is a man of good character. Beyond the testimony of fellow Christians, he is found to be true by the truth itself. Demetrius was likely the bearer of the epistles.

He was possibly sent as more than simply a message bearer, but as a representative of John in some greater capacity. The ending of 3 John is much the same as the ending of 2 John. John shares his intention to see Gaius soon, when he visits the congregation again.

Then they will be able to talk face to face. He concludes his letter by conveying greetings. Such a letter isn't merely correspondence from one Christian to another.

It is also a channel by which Christians who would never have had the chance to travel any great distance in their lives could nonetheless be in regular contact with Christians elsewhere in the empire, communicating their needs and greetings through their ministers. A bishop-like figure like John ensured that local churches were opened up and connected to the universal church, preventing them from becoming insular or sectarian.

A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which churches can protect themselves from figures like Diotrephes?