

Bibi's endless war

## **The biblical king Amaziah stands as a warning to Israel's prime minister. He is not heeding the warning.**

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Century illustration

King Amaziah is not one of your famous Israeli monarchs, but his story tells us much about the present conflict in Gaza. In the second book of Chronicles, chapter 25, we are told that he becomes king at the age of 25 and reigns for 29 years. He does right

in the eyes of the Lord but does so half-heartedly. No reason is given for this lack of enthusiasm, but the following verses hint at the cause: After his regime stabilizes itself, he kills off the servants of his late father who had conspired against him and assassinated him.

No wonder Amaziah is ambivalent about his anointing! On the one hand, he is now a powerful king; on the other, he is utterly vulnerable to everyone around him, even his allegedly trustworthy servants. To underline his fealty to tradition, the verses go on to emphasize that Amaziah does not kill the children of his father's assassins, since it is written in Moses' Torah that one should not kill the children for the sins of the father.

As king, Amaziah raises an army of 300,000 from Judeah (the southern kingdom loyal to the line of David) and a further 100,000 troops from the Northern kingdom of Israel. This last gesture brings down upon him the wrath of God, who wants nothing to do with the rebellious idolaters of Israel. God commands the king to send them back to their own territory, and so they return, "angry as hell" (2 Chron. 25:10).

Amaziah then attacks 10,000 of the children of Seir, who are Esau's offspring. He does so, however, in the most extreme fashion, throwing them off from the top of a mountain so that their bodies are broken into pieces. This, too, brings a divine censure because it is unnecessarily cruel. The *Ptichta* (*Eicha Rabba 14*) explains that "God was angry since He decreed that the sons of Noah (i.e. everyone except Israel) if they are in a war situation against Israel, should be killed by being put to the sword."

These days, people are being "broken in pieces" (*nivkaoo* in Hebrew) when they are attacked by bombs which have such an effect. The lesson for us is clear.

Unnecessary cruelty, such as is being waged by Israel's government in Gaza, has no place in a Jewish army. Benjamin Netanyahu, who surely knows the story of Amaziah, seems impervious to its implications for his own campaign against the inhabitants of Gaza.

I'm writing from my home in Jerusalem, where last month, my eye caught a small notice on the inside of the pages of *HaAretz*. Initially, I was surprised that it did not make bigger headlines on the front page of the esteemed newspaper. In essence, the article was a quote from the army that claimed that Hamas, even after this long,

drawn-out war, still possesses many hundreds if not thousands of long range missiles. According to the army's estimates, Hamas is not using these missiles at present, preferring to wait for a more appropriate opportunity sometime in the future. In addition to their arsenal of weapons, the army reckons that, despite their huge losses during this war, Hamas can still field 40,000 soldiers—the exact number they possessed when attacking Israel on October 7, 2023. All this despite the army's insistence that it has weakened Hamas as a fighting force in all areas of military activity!

How should we take these two contradictory claims? Is Hamas a spent force or a still-vibrant army of terrorists armed to the teeth with highly sophisticated missiles? The possibility that Hamas has retained its numbers stands in sharp contrast to the daily bulletins issued by our army that the terrorists are losing badly, their ranks shrinking by the day. Hamas is still here. Maybe their strength has been shattered, but they still apparently have enough manpower to continue fighting. Despite the fact that our army has vanquished Hamas's leaders one by one, they are still lobbing missiles into Israel's territory almost every day, reminding us that they are still a force to be reckoned with.

If this is so, then we must ask: what is the point of continuing the conflict? What is most disturbing about this report is its implication that for all its military successes in Gaza, the Israeli army has not moved the threat of Hamas by one inch. Moreover, the deaths of hundreds of our soldiers have been in vain. Their bravery has been shown to be futile.

Perhaps it was for this reason that the newspaper decided not to make the report into a front page story. In addition, it does not quote a specific source, but rather uses the vague phrase "The army thinks." But the army has not denied the claims in the article. And nobody has put forward a believable alternative explanation as to how this rag-tag collection of non-professional fighters is still making a mockery of Israel's hugely armed forces with the backing of the United States's military expertise.

Retrospectively, a case can be made that Netanyahu's goal has always been to achieve something that no one else could have even imagined: the obliteration of Israel's number one enemy, the Palestinians. It seems that while everyone else was wondering why the October 7 attack took place, Netanyahu saw an opportunity to use the attack for his own purposes. All of his belligerent pronouncements since the

start of the war suggest a deliberate strategy, a campaign designed to bring only praise from an otherwise demoralized nation. In Netanyahu's rhetoric, Bibi is the savior, the one who fulfills the messianic strain of complete victory over the dark forces of evil. In this view, the enemy is not Hamas but rather the Palestinians themselves, from whose guts Hamas is spawned.

By using Hamas as an excuse to wreak havoc on the population of Gaza, Netanyahu can achieve his real objective. Hamas is the *casus belli* but not the ultimate goal. The fact that President Trump not only agreed to Bibi's outrageous plans but took them one step further by suggesting that Gaza be turned into another Las Vegas by the sea has only encouraged Bibi to proceed with his murderous agenda. People are no longer important. What is essential is territory.

The most recent development of this seemingly endless warfare—the attack on Iran—is congruent with Netanyahu's general outlook. Once Iran is nullified, the Palestinians will have nowhere else to go for help. In Netanyahu's fervid mind, the Palestinians will just disappear and Bibi will reign forever.

This is a reenactment of Ahab and Jezebel's plot to take over the vineyards of Naboth, to which the prophet Elijah asked rhetorically "Have you murdered a man, and now taken his property?" (1 Kings 21:19). What happened to Ahab and Jezebel as a consequence of their murderous plot is clearly set out in the book of Kings. Bibi, beware, you might achieve what you wished for.