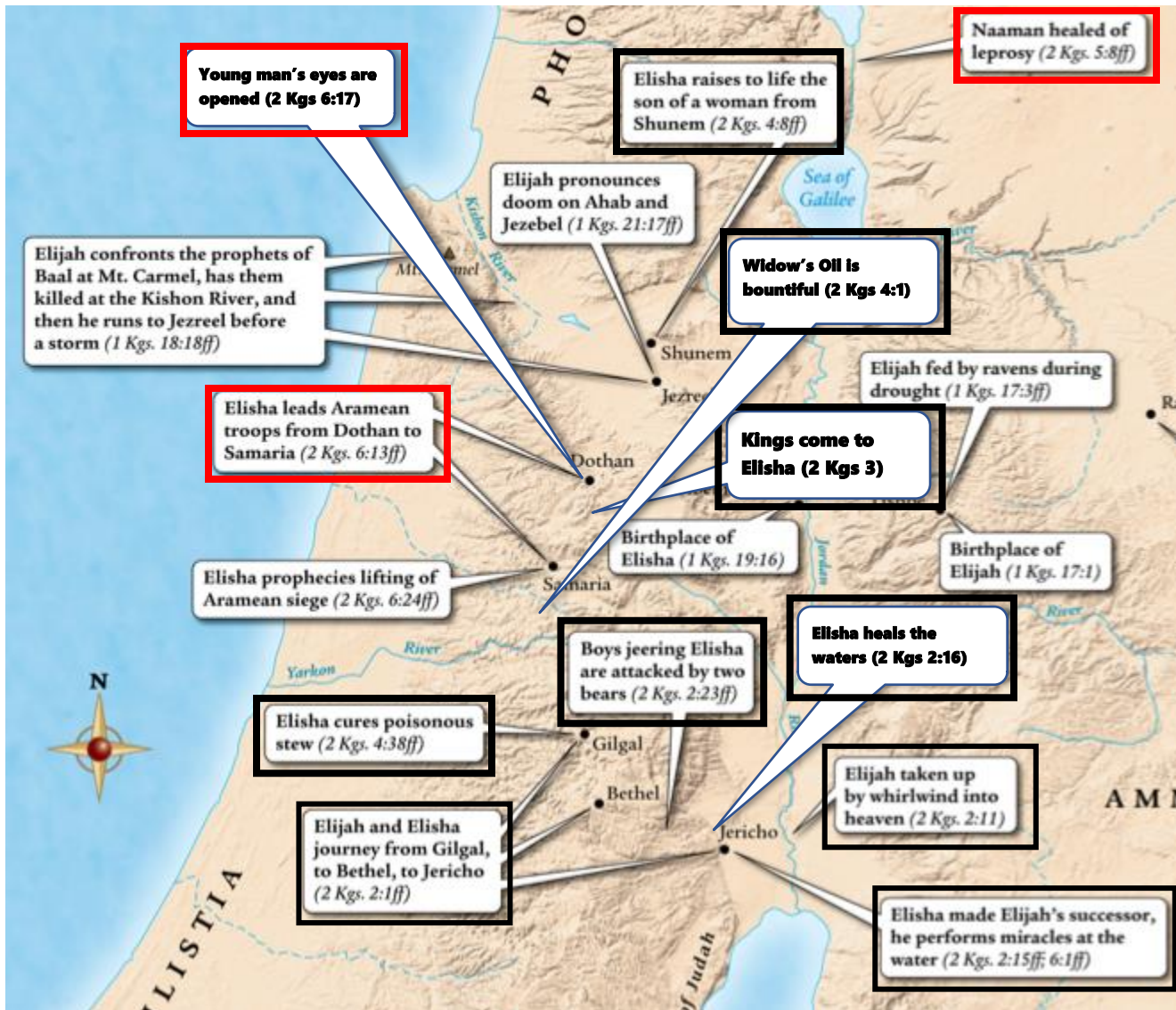


Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. (Psa 115:11)

Today we will continue our investigation into the life and acts of Elisha, seeking patience and comfort from these things that have been written for our learning

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Rom 15:4)



As we continue our analysis of Elisha, I hope that no one has found this tedious or repetitive. The humility, service, patience and courage of Elisha are all themes we see playing out repeatedly, but hopefully covering those wonderful qualities doesn't bore anyone. Lord willing, I think two more outings with Elisha will wrap up our time with him, but we'll see.

Today we are going to examine Elisha's interaction with Naaman. This takes up an entire chapter in its telling, but it is worth reading in its entirety to get the full sense of the event.

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me. And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my

master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.” (2Ki 5:1-27)

Here we have Naaman, a man of great power, status, and wealth who literally has the entire world at his disposal; he has so much influence that kings seek to intercede on his behalf. His life, which appears to be perfect, is marred by the one affliction for which the fleshly world has no answer. He stands as a representative of the state of man as a whole – we all live in a state of total desperation, unable to save ourselves from our total helplessness. Remember, when it came to leprosy, that even the priests of the Most High God had no cure; their only instruction and ability was to identify the disease, and see to its exclusion from the camp. Men are just as unable to save their souls as Naaman was to heal his leprosy. In both cases, there is absolute dependency on God to save.

So we have this great heathen man, in the midst of a greater affliction, yet the Lord provides a method of salvation to even this Gentile. A “little maid”, who is herself under a great affliction – captive of the Syrians, far from home and what she knows, kept in the home of a great afflicter of her people – she lifts her small voice up to instruct her captor in the only hope available – presenting the affliction before the Lord her God via His servant.

Look at how amazing this is. Is it not a bright shining reminder of this foundational doctrine

“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” (Rom 9:15)

God shows this man great mercy and that through an utterly unexpected place. This little maid is unnamed, we know nothing more about her, but she is no less potent a vessel than the man of God she sends him to. She delivers a simple message out of mercy to her enemy.

- We never know who our message is for, who will hear and what work God is doing by putting us in a place, so we must keep the message free of our own wisdom and deliver a pure Gospel.

No less remarkable than the little maid being in Naaman’s house is the fact that this great man, a Gentile idolater actually listens and takes action based on her words; words that reach him quite indirectly, from the maid to his wife, his wife to a servant, the servant to Naaman. Look how wonderfully this demonstrates this precept

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33)

- When God appoints a thing to happen, there is a directed path to the thing’s execution, and frequently it is beyond our understanding to grasp how it happened – but that is part of the glory of it and we should be thankful and praise Him for it.

Of course, it’s not as simple as Naaman just picking up and going to Elisha. Naaman’s king sees this as only a matter of the flesh, requiring a diplomatic envoy and money. The world always sees money as the answer to their problems as it is the ultimate expression of their strength. The little maid didn’t say anything about money or gifts, remember, yet that’s what Benhadad sends Naaman with.

The king of Israel also sees only the fleshly elements involved here and doesn’t look to the possibility of a spiritual answer. It requires Elisha intervening to bring any sense of God’s involvement to the forefront. It seems he had some knowledge of the situation from the Lord, though he doesn’t declare anything other than Naaman will know there is a prophet in Israel. He doesn’t claim he will heal the man, or make any claims about any power he holds, only that Naaman, this great heathen, will know a sure thing.

- Our first instinct should be to look at the spiritual aspects of a situation, trusting in God to address the logistical elements of a matter. We must not fret the

sufficiency of our strength to address a thing but call upon the Lord for understanding and relief when needed.

Again, we see a great work in the matter when Naaman goes to Elisha. Think about how odd this would have been to watch these two kings behave in this way, and yet he goes anyway. His reaction is fleshly and fairly expected. He expects to be served in a manner as befitting a man of his station. He wants a little Benny Hinn showmanship. Instead, he gets a servant of the man of God he intends to visit telling him to go wash in a river, and a pretty lame one at that.

He has traveled all this way, has operated more with a curiosity than in any faith, and then at the finish line he rejects the method he is given to achieve his desired end because it does not comport with his notions of sophistication, elegance, science, or religion. “Go wash in Jordan seven times to be cleansed of this disease? What kind of hogwash is that?” Of course, it doesn’t make sense. He’s probably bathed in every kind of smelly concoction, specialized bath and nonsensical mixture available in Syria to no effect. What good would this piddling little Jordan river do? But that’s all the flesh here. He went to a man of God for help, but disregards the help provided in pride – how often do we do similar things?

- If you go to God to get an answer, and His servants are delivering one, listen. Don’t come with your own answer, and when counsel doesn’t match what you think the answer should be, disregard it outright.

Again, we see a “little” voice bring him to seeing his fleshly folly. His servant brings him around to seeing the silliness in his pride and refusal to do this simple thing that would heal him.

- Sometimes, the voices we consider small are the most important to listen to. The Lord uses the vessel He deems appropriate to the task, and it behooves us to always have our ears and hearts open to hearing Him.

And then we come to Gehazi. Elisha refuses to take of Naaman’s wealth, and Gehazi just can’t take it. He wrongly attributes the miracle, you see. He says “*my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought*” giving the glory to Elisha, not God. It’s an easy place to fall into, and you see what a grievous result it has for the poor man. Remember this verse and hold it dear

“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”
(1Ti 6:10)

Not money, for the Lord may bless His people with prosperity, and no thing the Lord gives in blessing is evil; but the love of money is the root of all evil. That is the heart of

Gehazi's sin – he loves money and believes he is entitled to something for the work that God has done via the hand of His servant. That love of money breeds dishonesty and he lies to Naaman. He knows that he isn't going to convince Naaman that Elisha suddenly changed his mind – he was adamant that he would not take a thing from him – so he lies to hide his greed from Naaman. Look at how the love of money truly is the root of all evil. He lies and brings infamy on Elisha by saying he was sent!

How many of these does Gehazi fall into

“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” (Pro 6:16-19)

All this sin over some silver he thinks to acquire for work he didn't do! Naaman is suckered into Gehazi's sin and this, I think carries a small warning for us. He is a generous man, and I don't think seeking to do anything wrong with his gifts, but he should have been more cautious. Not everyone who comes asking charity is in genuine need. Gehazi's lying use of the sons of the prophets is intended to pull on Naaman's generosity, which works wonderfully because Naaman doesn't try Gehazi's intentions.

But there was no right to this reward. Elisha puts this so well

“Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?” A rhetorical question, whose obvious answer is emphatically 'no!' We seek reward for this life's labors, surely, but this is not the time to receive them!

- Reward for the work we do in the name of our Master is not here. What we receive here from our Father is for the doing of the job, these are loaned resources, and we should neither expect nor even desire such rewards.

What a sad end we see Gehazi come to. Sad, but properly deserved. He spends the rest of his days, and his whole line carries the leprosy of Naaman as his mark. He sought to hide his ill-gotten gains and continues in his sin by lying to Elisha about his mission. Once in the grip of sin, it can be impossible to get out. His love of money has undone not only him, but his entire line.

Consider the justice of the punishment. He was overtaken with coveting the things that Naaman possessed, and he didn't deserve – and now he had received for his wickedness that thing of Naaman's he didn't seek, but did so richly deserve. The Lord

is just in all His ways indeed. He sought to hide the greed of his soul with piety and serving at the prophet's feet, and God exposed the truth of his soul for all to see.

The second event for today is I think largely overlooked by many expositors for its simplicity, and they ignore what the larger message from it is. It's one of my favorite parts of Elisha's life though, because it is so applicable to our daily lives.

“And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.” (2Ki 6:1-7)

This is such a wonderful view of what might appear to be mundane. We have Elisha engaged in the affairs of daily life, and even in them see the working of God. While some of Elisha's more spectacular appearing miracles were spread across Israel, his perspective doesn't change when he is in his home base. He is the same person whether in front of kings, or with the young men he teaches in the ways of God. Look at the willingness of student and teacher to put their hands to necessary work. This expansion wasn't vanity but practical necessity. There is nothing amiss here in what they are trying to do – they're literally running out of space to do the work they've been given to do. If it were something inappropriate, Elisha would not have encouraged the project or engaged himself in it. There was nothing ostentatious about what they were building or doing, they used borrowed tools and built a simple structure out of wood – not marble or other ostentatious materials.

The lessons here are several from this simple little glimpse into Elisha's world

- We must not be afraid of doing physical work, regardless of station or role.
- Be conscientious with those things especially that are borrowed – and remember that all things are borrowed.
- Know that our Master, who has loaned all things to us, will help us when we make mistakes to restore us, if we but ask.

Our final event for today is one we frequently reference for the wonder of being given spiritual sight

“Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent

unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber. And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them? And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.” (2Ki 6:8-23)

Syria was a constant threat to Israel in these days, and the Lord at times delivered Israel into the hand of Syria's king, and sometimes didn't. Here He uses Elisha to thwart the intent of Benhadad. That use as a vessel draws Benhadad's ire onto Elisha, as it frequently does for God's servants. We cannot expect to serve Him and declare his truth without consequence, because as we see here, His ways are at war with the ways of the flesh and men. Sometimes the response is slight, sometimes the enemy king sends a great host in an utterly disproportionate response. We know plenty about disproportionate responses from the world, and draw comfort from our Master's words:

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” (Joh 15:18)

Regardless of what the king does, whether minor or extreme, our response ought to be the same – one of measured faith. “*And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not..*” Fear not, is Elisha’s answer, not pack the rain jackets and some canned goods, grab water bottles and we’re gonna get the heck out of here. Just “fear not”. In the face of panic and certain capture if not death, a simple “fear not”. There is an example to heed.

His calm in the face of life-threatening danger is an exceptional example for us. We individually and as a body have faced this same kind of serious issue many times. Make no mistake, Elisha’s life was on the line here. He was interfering with Benhadad’s military aspirations, and that’s serious business. Kings kill for less. But Elisha shows no distress, belies no turmoil in his spirit; he turns his attention to helping his distraught servant instead.

Elisha’s kindness to his frightened, faith-failing servant is exceptional and an exemplar to us – he doesn’t berate him but gives him the admonition and then shows him why the admonition is genuine and has real reason to be kept. What he does should serve us as though the sight he asks to be given to his servant is given to us personally. We should be able to look at this event and know inherently that “*they that be with us are more than they that be with them*”. This is why these things are written for our knowledge – so that we don’t have to each individually experience these things on our own. I never rule out that someone could experience such an amazing thing, but here we have the instruction and example to help us know this truth and battle our flesh.

- In the face of danger (great or small), keeping our emotions in check and recalling to mind Elisha’s admonition to his servant is our responsibility. It is our job to check our flesh and keep our passions under control as a fundamental part of how we live. Helping those whose sight fails them is a privilege, requiring kindness, not belittling for a lack of faith.

The next thing Elisha does here is no less amazing to me. Leading Benhadad’s host on essentially a wild goose chase has always struck me as a little bit funny. The visual of Elisha marching at the front of a great host of armed men who have all been blinded by God Almighty, like the Pied Piper leading the rats almost, is just amazing. Most expositors say these men were selectively blinded – not unlike the men of Sodom groping about looking for Lot – so that it was simple for Elisha to lead them from Dothan to Samaria. They either didn’t understand that this was Elisha standing in front of them, or just couldn’t see him, but could see to march forth, and were so eager in their task they followed him without question.

Elisha operates with extreme mercy, not letting the king of Israel harm these men who came to harm him. He had no orders to slay, so he did not slay. The enemy is in God’s hands even when it appears for a moment that they are in ours, and we must be cautious what actions we take without direction from God.

I want you to take explicit notice as to how Elisha “accomplished” both the sight for his servant, and the blindness of Benhadad’s host. He engaged the Lord with prayer. I know I sound a little like a broken record because I refer to the importance of prayer a lot, but this is a point I think bears repeating to each other as often as we can. When you are in distress, have you prayed? When you’ve prayed, have you prayed some more? These examples are, I say again, here for our learning. Elisha is such a wonderful example to learn from – he doesn’t spend a lot of time with words, or trying to arrange the situation, he simply prays. The Lord provides when we come to Him.

If your reaction to my saying this is a “yeah, but...” all I can do is point you to Scripture

*“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. **The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**” (Jas 5:16)*

James uses the example of Elijah withholding the rain through his prayer, and I use the examples of Elisha in addition. These are the behaviors, practices and habits that we should be learning from these things that were written aforetime for our learning.

- Prayer is our tool, our weapon, our refuge, but only if we use it, and use it in faith. Rote prayer, or “just in case” prayer is not effectual, it is fleshly and not done in faith. We must believe, with no “backup plan” that our prayer will be heard and it will be answered in the way that glorifies God and works to our good.

I hope you are seeing here that even in these magnificent events where things are done we don’t necessarily do in our ministry, there are great lessons and examples to follow, that these things genuinely were written that we might gain knowledge.

Lord willing, next time I have the privilege of speaking to you all, we will look at several more of Elisha’s works that provide us lessons in our day. Until then, I pray that

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,” (2Pe 1:2)