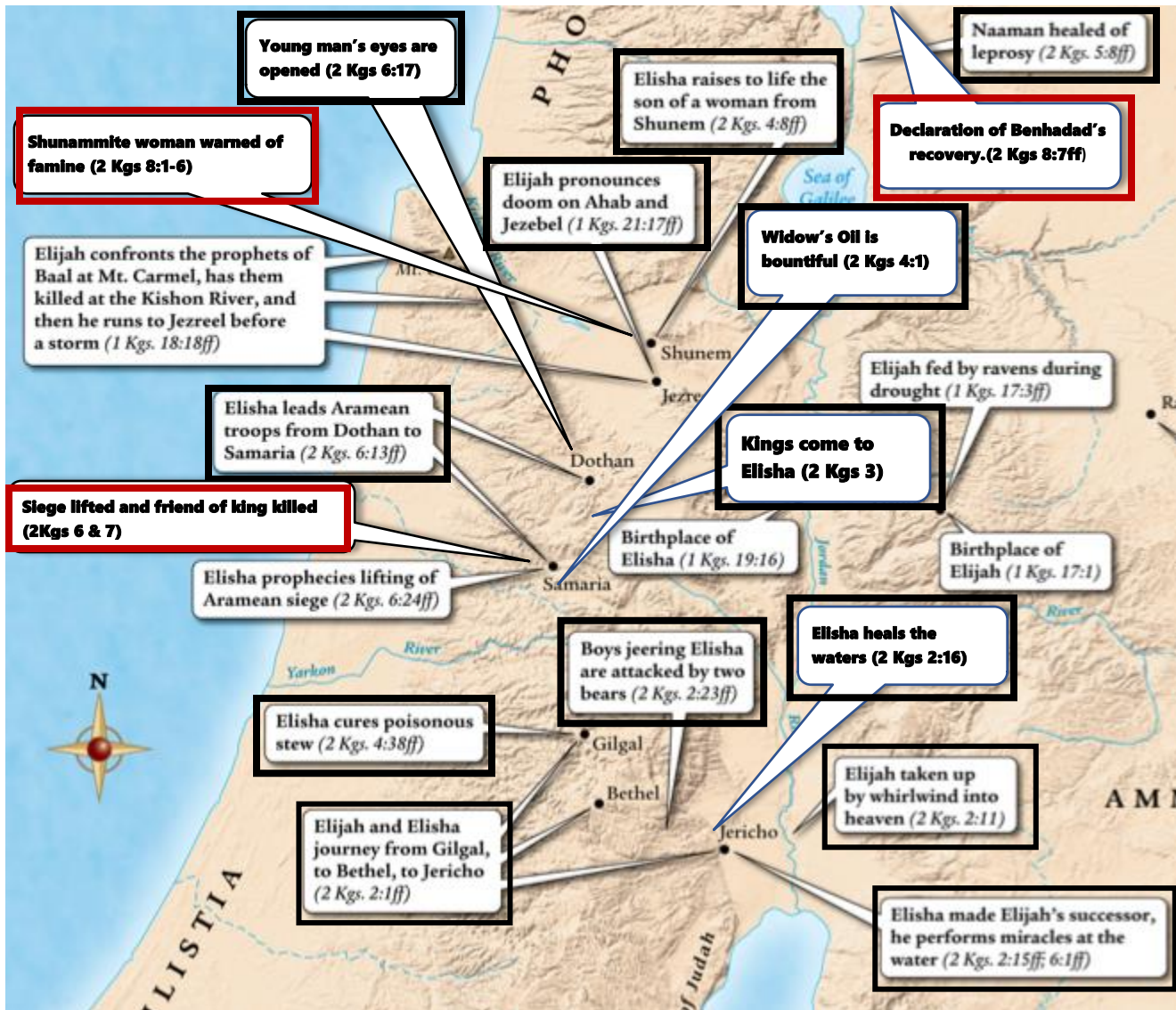


***Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield.  
(Psa 115:11)***

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)*



We are coming closer to the end of Elisha's tenure as God's ambassador in the earth, but I hope as we examine events today, you'll see that not much changes with him. He continues his stalwart defense of God and his faithful behavior, operating as an excellent example for us to emulate in our lives.

We will start today with one of the few actual confrontations he has with the king of Israel.

*“And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress? And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh. Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day. But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer? Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.” (2Ki 6:24-7:2)*

If you've been following closely, you'll remember from last time that the “bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel”. But we have right at the start of our first passage that Benhadad, the king of Syria, has come with his host to besiege Samaria. What gives? If the bands weren't coming into the land anymore, what's this siege? It's important to understand the distinction between the bands of Syria like took the little maid who served Naaman, and the host of Syria's army. This isn't an inconsistency or a mistake. They are two different things. The warlords and military leaders of Syria were allowed to harass Israel's people and loot their resources, pretty much at will for their own benefit. Here, Benhadad is conducting a full military operation against the kingdom of Israel and besieging the capital city as part of that action.

Two images of consistency exist in this account for me. First, the fickle and thankless nature of human leaders. Joram, who had just recently been delivered from the roving bands of Syria, had them delivered right to his door in fact, threatens the life of the prophet. Which leads to the second consistent behavior – Elisha's calm. That little

conjunction ‘but’ says a lot. There is this raging public tempest of the king, which Elisha knows about and is on full display for all the people, **but** Elisha is simply sitting at home talking to the elders of Samaria. A remarkable example of how to behave in the face of tyranny.

*“Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.” (Psa 27:3)*

*“And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” (Luk 12:4)*

- The importance of keeping our passions under control, especially in the face of a raging adversary cannot be overstated. Elisha is an unmatched example to emulate in this regard.

Elisha isn’t just lounging with the elders; he is clearly discussing the seriousness of the situation they find themselves in and preparing to engage with Joram. He is again supernaturally given knowledge of the situation on the ground and is aware that the king has sent a messenger – a messenger with the power of death in his hands – and the king himself is hot on his heels. Elisha arranges the situation such that he can deliver a message to the king by having them bar the door.

The king is in a place of utter despair over the state of affairs. But it appears he has gotten his passions under some sort of control by the time he arrives at Elisha’s home, since he didn’t kill him on the spot. The messenger is held up at the door, and it is the king that says “[B]ehold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?” The flesh is unable to cope and gives up, which might explain the king’s utterances against Elisha. His utterance is still one of utter despair. Joram has a right view of this point

*“Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amo 3:6)*

But he only sees it academically, not as a matter of faithful recognition of God’s sovereignty. He isn’t bowing to God’s power or acknowledging the righteousness of His actions. He’s still railing against it and trying to blame Elisha for it.

Despite the rage against him, Elisha delivers a hopeful message to Joram. Take note here of Elisha’s tone to the king. While in private he might not have been particularly kind in how he spoke of Joram “*See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head*”, he has nothing to say about those matters now that the king is in his presence. I see a couple of things in this. First is recognition that this is a man who has lost all perspective and therefore all control of his tongue – it doesn’t excuse the behavior, but there’s no reason to return like for like. I think there is also some respect

for the office, as the king has come to his home. He could have easily called him “son of a murderer” to his face – that is after all a fact, not just some emotional declaration. But it doesn’t appear that reminding Joram of the sinfulness of his heritage was the goal here – Elisha was sent to relieve the distress and poking the king in the eye didn’t add anything to that mission.

- It’s important to keep to the message, not trying to vindicate ourselves or take shots at people when it doesn’t add anything.

We also gain a little insight into perhaps how the king got into the state he is in. The man “upon whose hand the king leaned”, on hearing the words of the prophet – who remember is delivering “the word of the LORD” – this man’s reaction is to argue and refute them as impossible.

This lord is in the king’s ear constantly, and it would appear he gives him horrible counsel. He is faithless and unbelieving, and rather than guiding Joram to take full advantage of this man of God being in his back yard, argues with his prophecy. Rather than grabbing ahold of the grace and respite being foretold by Elisha, this lord denies the power of God in the matter, shortening His arm and limiting His ability to relieve Israel except by opening the windows of heaven as He did with the manna in the wilderness.

Unbelief is a grave sin, and the results of it are on full display. Note again, Elisha doesn’t rail against the insult lobbed against him here but states the facts – this man will see the goodness of God but will not be allowed to partake in it himself.

Of course, it is precisely as Elisha foretells. We all know this element of the history – the Syrians flee, having heard a noise that terrifies them by the miraculous hand of God, the lepers who sat by the gate go out and discover this fact, their conscience pricks them into sharing the good favor of God with the rest of the city, and when the citizens of the city burst forth to take the spoil, the king’s man gets his reward:

*“And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.” (2Ki 7:20)*

The city full of starving people set on a stampede out of the city gates and this lord, the king’s man who thought he had it all, died for his unbelief. Again, unbelief is a grave sin that leads to complete decay of a person.

- Who you surround yourself with and seek counsel from is maybe one of the most important things you can do in your life. Rejecting clear counsel from those of faith while taking counsel from unbelievers is a body and soul-damning path.

Next, we again get to see another wonderful interaction with the faithful Shunammite woman, where her faith and care for the man of God are rewarded with temporal blessing and respite from the burden of the impending famine.

*“Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land. And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.” (2Ki 8:1-6)*

As always, this Shunammite takes Elisha’s words seriously and acts upon them with faith. Juxtapose that to Joram’s close advisors’ behavior – with her there is no questioning, there is no argument, there is only obedience and trust. It brings to mind this verse:

*“A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.”*  
(Pro 13:17)

We frequently discuss the fact that this life we live is one of pilgrimage, not our final resting place, and that our expectations need to be focused on that appropriately. Our final reward is not here, not to be expected in this life, but that doesn’t mean that there are no rewards to be had as we go along. Faith and belief are rewarded by God as this incident puts on display. In the moment, being uprooted from your home and life might not seem like a reward, but in comparison to living through a famine with great hardship, it is a great mercy. And if we keep our focus properly placed, not on the physical things of this life, it is a light thing to leave those things and go where the Lord directs us as this woman did – leave hearth and home to go to a place she doesn’t know.

- We need not have any expectation of reward in this life but receiving it as a part of faithful life isn’t irregular or a sign of anything other than our Father’s care for us.

The more remarkable part of this tale to me, however, is the discussion between Gehazi and the king. This wicked man Joram refuses to engage with the remarkable resource he has right in front of him. He found it preferable to engage with a leper and hear stories than to just speak with Elisha directly.

You might wonder why Gehazi was even on the scene. Shouldn't he have been put out of the camp (Num 5:2)? If you consider the apostate state of Israel at this time, it is no wonder that the king would have an unclean person directly in his bosom. It was an affront to God, frankly – treating the unclean as clean – but when religion has been reduced to worshiping two golden calves, is it any surprise such a thing as the law of the leper would be so callously disregarded?

Look at our own age, where the 'heroes' touted all over the place are those who would carve up and mangle their bodies in defiance of how God has clearly made them. The more into apostasy and idolatry a nation declines, the more the abominations and examples of sin become the highlights and 'holy ones'.

This inexcusable disregard for simple obedience on the part of Joram still serves a purpose in the Lord's providence in a most gracious way. The Shunammite woman and her house are again saved by the grace of God through her relationship with Elisha. Simple kindness for him and tending to his needs has reaped her bountiful rewards.

- The aid and succor we give – without expectation of repayment or reward – does not go unnoticed by our Master. He notes it all and brings it back into remembrance at the perfect time for us.

You might notice the stark difference between the Shunammite's behavior here and in the past. If you recall, Elisha offered to speak on her behalf to the king or the captain of the host after her initial kindness to him, and she declined, saying "*I dwell among mine own people*" (2 Ki 4:13). It would appear that her people had turned on her, whomever she left in charge of the estate failed in their fiduciary duty while she was away, or something similar. The change in circumstances left her with nothing and the king was apparently her last recourse. The Lord ordered the woman's lot and ordered this deliverance via His prophet, though indirectly here – which maybe makes it all the greater a deliverance.

- There are times when the vessels of our deliverance are those very individuals whose sins we preach against and may be counted as our enemies – whether they are governments or individuals. We must not shorten the arm of the Lord and be willing to humble ourselves, making diligent inquiry of Him in times of trouble, seeing when the friends of mammon we make will be used to deliver us.

Next, we have Elisha involved in matters of State.

*“And Elisha came to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Benhadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die. And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria. So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead.” (2Ki 8:7-15)*

There are a lot of theories as to why Elisha traveled to Damascus, including his checking in on Naaman. Hazael it seems is now the captain of Benhadad's host, and apparently Naaman is no longer on that scene, perhaps because he will not bow to Rimmon anymore. All speculation, but interesting. We know the Lord moved him to travel to Damascus, because he went, and there is no word that it was improper. I am of the mind, especially given what happens here ultimately, that he was about the business of completing this task:

*“And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:” (1Ki 19:15)*

This task given Elijah has yet to be completed, and Elisha is sent to deal with it, though not in a direct fashion.

Make note of the fact that when he perceives all is well, Benhadad is a devout and well-known worshiper of the false god Rimmon, but when difficulty comes on the scene, it is the God of creation he seeks. The old “there are no atheists in foxholes” aphorism comes to mind here. Benhadad sends Hazael to make inquiry, he does not send a low-level messenger to demand Elisha come to him, presumably as a demonstration of respect. He sends an important member of his court with an abundance of gifts.

Notice Elisha says nothing about these gifts but gets straight to business. He shows no interest in them but also doesn't reject them the way he had with Naaman. Benhadad has Hazael address Elisha with great honor, ordering Hazael to refer to Benhadad as Elisha's son. Everything done is in the flesh designed to appeal to Elisha's ego and to draw him in, to manipulate him into helping, not believing a man of God would simply perform this kindness. Elisha serves again as the prime example of resisting the temptations of the flesh – he is indifferent to them and gets down to business. And what business it was.

Elisha shocks Hazael with the revelation that he will be king, and is moved, deeply moved, to tears at what he is supernaturally allowed to understand. Similar to the knowledge that brings Jeremiah to deep lamentations and made Daniel grieve in his spirit, even Christ weep over Jerusalem, Elisha sees the judgment that Hazael will bring upon Israel. This is not a typical anointing of a king, but he has anointed him nonetheless; he is anointed in blood and he rules in blood.

- Even when the message is difficult for us to accept emotionally, it isn't our job to filter it or modify it in some way. There are difficult things to come, and we can't hide from them or not deliver an unvarnished truth to spare our own fleshly concerns.

Of course, Hazael is dishonest in his delivery of Elisha's message, and steals the throne from Benhadad as Elisha understood he would, and the rest of what Elisha saw of course comes to pass.

We will, Lord willing, conclude our discussions on Elisha the next time I speak to you. This has been a very educational journey for me, and I hope it has for you as well.

Until next time, I pray that

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