

Elisha: Seeing the Hand of God at Work

Session 5

May 25, 2025

God's Hand in Facing Opposition

Session Passage: 2 Kings 6:8-12,15-23

2 Kings 6:8-12

Connection to the Point: Elisha informed the king of Israel of the actions of the Aramean army.

King of Aram (v. 8). Whereas previously the king of Israel had mistakenly feared the king of Aram (Syria) was trying to goad him into a conflict (5:7), now the two nations were at war. It is probable that at this time Aram's military was stronger than that of Israel. This was suggested earlier when the king of Israel had thought the king of Aram was trying to pick a fight with him by requesting he heal the Aramean Naaman's skin disease; the Israelite king tore his clothes, an expression of grief and mourning, acknowledging that his kingdom could not win against the might of the Arameans.

In both instances, neither the king of Aram nor the king of Israel understood the nature and power of God. While that is not surprising for a pagan king, what is shocking is the king of Israel's lack of understanding. His role was to lead God's people in living in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, the God of Israel. Instead, he viewed life from merely an earthly, human perspective.

Waging war (v. 8). King David had successfully defeated and occupied Aram (2 Sam. 8:5-6; 10:6-19), but during the time of King Solomon the Arameans waged war against Israel (1 Kings 11:25). Then when Israel split into the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah after Solomon's death, the Arameans took advantage of the weaknesses that came with the nation's division. The relationship between Aram and the two kingdoms would continue—sometimes as enemies, sometimes as allies—until the Assyrians conquered Aram and deported the Arameans in 732 BC. It has been suggested by Bible students that the type of warfare referenced here are raids and ambushes by the Arameans. The true strength of the Israelites was not their army, but rather their God. In a somewhat amusing scenario, every time the king of Aram made a military decision related to the conflict with the kingdom of Israel, God revealed the king's plans to the prophet Elijah who then warned the king of Israel. As a result, Israel's army was able to evade the Aramean army's attempted ambushes. So, while the two countries were at war, very little actual fighting was taking place.

Enraged (v. 11). The king of Aram became enraged, believing one of his servants was revealing his plans to the king of Israel. The literal meaning of the Hebrew term refers to a great wind or a violent storm. In much the same way that hurricane winds rage, the king of Aram got stirred up because he believed one of his servants was betraying him.

My lord (v. 12). The Hebrew word for the covenant name of God, Yahweh, is indicated in the Old Testament by the word “Lord.” In this instance, the word translated “lord” does not refer to God. The servant in this verse was identifying the Aramean king as his master or ruler, recognizing his authority over the servant.

Your bedroom (v. 12). The servant explained that none of the king’s people were betraying him. Rather it was the prophet Elisha who knew all the king’s plans, even the most private conversations the king had in his most intimate space, his bedroom. Elisha’s knowledge about all the king of Aram’s plans was not due to human informants or double agents embedded among the Arameans. Rather, Elisha had access to the king of Aram’s plans through supernatural means. Yahweh, the God of Israel, was revealing those plans to the prophet who then related them to the king of Israel.

2 Kings 6:15-17

Connection to the Point: God protected His people with an unseen army.

Context. Knowing that Elisha was thwarting his battle plans, the king of Aram sought to capture the prophet. He received intelligence that Elisha was in Dothan, so the king dispatched a massive army by night to seize the prophet. The scene is somewhat humorous and ironic. Since God had revealed all the previous plans of the king of Aram to Elisha, what made the Aramean king think his plan to capture the prophet would escape God’s notice this time? One of the reasons the king of Aram did not understand who he was dealing with was due to his bad theology—he did not understand the nature of Almighty God. The false gods he worshiped were merely idols, blocks of stone and wood. They were powerless. In contrast, the one true God is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and omnipresent (He is capable of being present everywhere at once). Nothing escapes His notice. Therefore, the king of Aram’s plan to capture Elisha was doomed from the start. The king’s futile attempt to silence Elisha is reminiscent of attempts that were made to capture or kill the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-2; 2 Kings 1:9-15).

The servant of the man of God (v. 15). In this instance, the name of the servant of Elisha is not given. Based on 2 Kings 8:4-5 where he is explicitly named as Gehazi, this servant is likely the same person who appeared in the earlier account related to the Aramean commander, Naaman (2 Kings 5). In that episode, Gehazi had approached Naaman after the commander of the Aramean military had been cured of his skin disease. While Elisha had refused to take the reward Naaman offered for being cured, Gehazi had taken the reward for himself. After being confronted by Elisha and lying about his actions, Gehazi was stricken with the same skin disease that had afflicted Naaman. The end of chapter 5 declares that Gehazi and his descendants would perpetually have the same skin disease. Bible students suggest that in an incredible example of the mercy of God, Gehazi was not left in that diseased state; he was healed. In an equally incredible example of the grace of God, Gehazi was restored to a place of honor of serving Elisha, the man of God.

Those who are with us (v. 16). While human beings usually view life in this world from a physical perspective, there is also a spiritual realm which is just as real and is populated by spiritual beings both good and evil. Just as human armies battle in the physical world, spiritual armies wage war in this other realm. For example, when the prophet Daniel prayed seeking to understand a revelation he had received from God, an angel was dispatched to explain the meaning of the revelation to the prophet. However, the angel was hindered for twenty-one days by an evil spiritual being identified as “the prince of the kingdom of Persia.” It was only after the angel Michael came to assist the messenger angel that he was able to fulfill his mission to Daniel. The messenger also told Daniel that when the angel left, the battle would continue as “the prince of Greece” would join the prince of Persia against the messenger angel and Michael (Dan. 10:10-21). Another reference to this spiritual realm is made by Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane; He spoke of how if He asked, God the Father would put twelve legions of angels (seventy-two thousand) at His disposal (Matt. 26:53).

Open his eyes (v. 17). Elisha’s request did not refer to his servant’s physical eyes; his servant was not blind in the sense of not being able to see the physical world around him. Instead, Elisha asked God to give his servant spiritual eyes to see the true reality of their situation. The servant’s “natural” reaction was to panic at the sight of the massive Aramean army that surrounded Dothan. But Elisha, the prophet of God, recognized that the omnipotent power of God was with him to protect him and his servant.

Horses and chariots of fire (v. 17). These words identify the forces sent by God to protect Elisha. They are a contrast to the relatively feeble power of the king of Aram, who sent “horses, chariots, and a massive army” to seize Elisha (v. 14). These horses and chariots of

fire recall the means by which the prophet Elijah had been taken up into heaven in a whirlwind (2:11-12). Fire in both instances indicates the presence of God.

2 Kings 6:18-23

Connection to the Point: Under Elisha's direction, the king of Israel treated the captured army with mercy.

Strike this nation with blindness (v. 18). In contrast to Elisha's prayer that his servant's eyes would be opened to see the host God had sent to protect the prophet and his servant, Elisha now addressed the Aramean army surrounding them. While Elisha and his servant were protected by God's horses and chariots of fire, Elisha went a step further in order to protect the Israelites, asking God to strike the Aramean army with blindness. God granted Elisha's prayer, and the Aramean army was rendered blind.

The man you're looking for (v. 19). The Aramean soldiers were sent by their king to go to Dothan to look for the troublemaker Elisha and to capture him. Ironically, the man speaking to them and "helping" them was the very man whom they were looking for! Yet, their blindness left them unable to recognize the man that they were seeking was in front of them. Instead of capturing Elisha, they were in effect his captives. Whereas they had laid siege in Dothan around the prophet, now the man they were seeking guided them into the presence of the king of Israel where the Arameans were at the king's mercy.

Entered Samaria (v. 20). Sometime after Israel split into two nations with the death of King Solomon, Samaria became the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria). It was located in the central highlands, about forty-two miles north of Jerusalem. King Omri, the kingdom's sixth ruler (reigned 885–874 BC), purchased the hill of Samaria for his residence and relocated the capital of the Northern Kingdom to Samaria. The city's location on a hill provided a significant military advantage. The Syrians twice laid siege to the city but were unsuccessful in their attempts to capture it (1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 6). The city eventually fell to the Assyrians after a three-year siege (2 Kings 17:5; 18:9-12).

When the Assyrians captured Samaria, most of the residents were deported, but some of the remaining Israelites eventually intermarried with the foreigners the Assyrians settled in the region (17:24). In the time of the New Testament, the central part of Israel (located between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south) was known as Samaria. Because of their intermarriage with Gentiles and their syncretistic religion (mixing the worship of Yahweh with that of false gods), a great animosity developed between the Samaritans and the Jews.

King of Israel (v. 21). The text does not name the specific king of Israel involved in these events. However, whatever his name, the account does not portray him as a godly king and makes clear that it was not his leadership that saved the people of Israel. Instead, it was God through His power and His prophet Elisha who saved both the king and the people of Israel from the army of Aram. One of the major themes of both the historical books and the prophets is that the kings of both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah often failed in their role as spiritual leaders of their peoples. Whereas those two nations were called to be witnesses to the world as God's people, they often ended up living just like their pagan neighbors.

My father (v. 21). While the king of Israel was the leader of his people, in this instance he recognized Elisha, the prophet of God, as being his spiritual superior. The king looked to Elisha for permission to do what he desired—to kill the captive Aramean soldiers who were at his mercy. Instead of giving the king permission to kill the Aramean soldiers, Elisha reasoned with the king that if these soldiers had been taken captive in battle, the king would not have killed them. They would have been taken as the spoils of war and enslaved.

A big feast (v. 23). When the king of Israel saw that the Aramean soldiers were his helpless captives, he asked Elisha if he should kill them. Instead of endorsing the king's plan, Elisha instructed the king that he should give the Arameans food and water and let the soldiers return to their master, the king of Aram (see Prov. 25:21-22; Rom. 12:20-21).

The Israelite king wanted to give the Aramean soldiers judgment and death, which would have been the expected response. An invading army intent on ambushing, killing, and kidnapping people deserved death. However, Elisha told the king to offer them mercy and grace. Mercy is not receiving the punishment deserved. Grace is being given benefits which are undeserved. Instead of death, the Arameans were treated to a great feast.

We all deserve God's judgment for our sinfulness. But the ultimate demonstration of grace and mercy is found in what God has done for us through His Messiah, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul taught that the payment we deserve for our sins is death, but the gift that we receive through Jesus Christ from God is forgiveness and eternal life (Rom. 6:23). God demonstrated His love for us in sending His Son to suffer the punishment we justly deserved for our sins. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are not simply forgiven of our sins; we are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:17-20) and adopted into His family (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:12-17). We are not only removed from the domain of darkness; we are transferred into the kingdom of His Son (Col. 1:13-14).