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Israel and Judah: 26. God's Miracles Through Elisha the Prophet

by David Sielaff, October 2017

Read first the October 1, 2017 Commentary, "[Miracles, Signs and Wonders.](#)"

Then read the accompanying [Newsletter for October 2017](#)

Israel and Judah: 26

God's Miracles
 through Elisha
 the Prophet

THE SITUATION: This entire article involves Elisha the Prophet, his work, and exploits. God used Elisha as His agent to perform twice as many miracles as Elijah did. Several are presented in this article. Elisha also preached to the people of the Kingdom of Israel, and taught "the sons of the prophets" about the Law of Moses. Elisha succeeded Elijah and took his position to become a teacher of teachers. There are no biblical writings by Elisha, only narratives about Elisha performing God's deeds as His agent.

Except for a brief mention by Jesus in Luke 4:27 there is no reference to Elisha outside of the Book of Second Kings. This article contains only single-source information exclusive to the Book of Second Kings. This article covers chapters 4 through 7. As always, my base text is the Concordant Literal Version.

As you read, remember that the nuances of dialogue are important, even though we might miss cultural clues for the full intent of their words. Like most Scripture, the message comes through. Remember that Elisha asked for a double portion of the spirit given to Elijah, and he received it (2 Kings 2:9–12). The short descriptions of events presented show even greater miracles being given than in Elijah's ministry.

TEXT: The Widow's Oil

2 Kings 4:1–7

¹ There was a certain woman among the wives of the sons of the prophets; she cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant, my husband, he is dead. And you yourself know that your servant was fearing Yahweh. Now the creditor has come to take my two boys as servants for himself."

² Elisha replied to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me what you have in the house." She said, "Your maidservant has nothing at all in the house save a jug of oil."

³ He replied,

“Go, ask for vessels for yourself from outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels; do not get only a few. ⁴ Then you will enter and close the door about you and about your sons. You will pour oil into all these vessels, and you shall put aside that which is full.”

⁵ So she went away from him and closed the door about her and about her sons; they were bringing vessels close to her, and she was pouring oil. ⁶ It came to be as the vessels were full that she said to her son, **“Do bring close to me another vessel.”** Yet he said to her, **“There is no other vessel. And the oil stayed.”**

⁷ Then she came and told the man of Elohim [Elisha]. He replied, **“Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons should live from what is left.”** [end text]

Verse 1. A poor widow with two sons **“cried out”** for help from Elisha. She had nowhere else to turn. She pointed out that her late husband feared YHWH, perhaps indicating he was one of the 7,000 who did not bow the knee to Baal when Elijah was ministering and later anointed Elisha as his replacement (1 Kings 19:16–19 and Romans 11:2–4). In other words, her husband was a righteous man before God and the community.

Verse 2. Elisha answered her directly, asking what assets she had. She had only oil.

Verses 3–4. Elisha made use of what she had, oil. She was to get empty containers for more oil. The act of pouring the oil apparently refilled the pouring container each time. At least that is what seemed to happen.

Verses 5–6. She followed Elisha’s instructions exactly, pouring the oil herself. All the vessels were eventually full and the woman and her sons were sustained enough to pay the debts with some left over.

A similar story of a widow being provided grain meal and oil happened during Elijah’s ministry (1 Kings 17:7–15). Those listening to the reading of events about Elisha’s ministry would have noted the similarities and subtle differences.

TEXT: A Son Is Given to a Shunammite Woman

2 Kings 4:8–17

⁸ It occurred one day that Elisha passed along to Shunem. There was a **great woman** who encouraged him to eat bread. And it came to be as often as he would pass along, he would turn in there to eat bread.

⁹ Once the woman said to her husband,

“Behold now, I know that he is a holy man of Elohim who is regularly passing by us. ¹⁰ I pray, let us make a small upper chamber of sidewalls and put there for him a couch and a table, a covered seat and a lampstand. So it will come to pass that he may withdraw there when he comes to us.”

¹¹ There was one day that he entered there, withdrew to the upper chamber and lay down there. ¹² He said to Gehazi his lad, **“Call this Shunammitess”**; so he called her, and she stood before him.

¹³ He said to him,

“Now tell her: Behold, you have been overanxious about us with all this solicitude [care, or hospitality]. What can be done for you? Is it to speak for you to the king or to the chief of the military host?”

She replied, **“I am dwelling in the midst of my people.”**

¹⁴ Now he said to Gehazi, **“And what is to be done for her?”** Gehazi answered, **“Verily, she has no son; as for her husband, he is old.”**

¹⁵ Now he said, **“Call her.”** So he called her, and she was standing at the opening.

¹⁶ Elisha said, **“At this appointed time according to the season of life, you will be embracing a son.”** But she replied, **“Certainly not, my lord, O man of the One, Elohim! You must not lie to your maidservant.”**

¹⁷ Yet the woman became pregnant and bore a son at this appointed time according to the season of life, just as Elisha had spoken to her. [end text]

Verse 8. She was **“great”** even though she was childless. This likely means she was honored or held in high regard by those around her. Some translations have that she was prominent or wealthy. She fed him as

he traveled by.

Verses 11–12. Gehazi was tasked to bring the woman to Elisha and the prophet spoke to her.

Verse 13. She was content with her situation! She needs nothing and desires nothing.

Verse 14. Gehazi was a smart young man. He had a solution for Elisha. **“She has no son.”** She was younger than her husband, perhaps much younger, as the text says **“her husband, he is old.”** This would be a wonderful gift.

Verses 16–17. Elisha made a specific prediction with a time frame, and that she will have a son. Her reply was disbelief. Perhaps she thought, “I’m no Sarah.” We are told the prediction came true in every detail, in the same season, a year after Elisha made his prediction.

TEXT: The Shunammite Woman’s Son Is Restored to Her

2 Kings 4:18–37

¹⁸ The boy grew up. There was one day when he went forth to his father among the reapers. ¹⁹ Then he was saying to his father, **“My head, my head!”** So he said to his lad, **“Carry him to his mother.”**

²⁰ Now he lifted him up and brought him to his mother. There he sat on her knees until noon; then he died.

²¹ She went up and laid him on the couch of the man of Elohim; she closed the door about him and went forth. ²² Now she called her husband and said, **“I pray, do send me one of the lads and one of the jennies [donkeys], and let me run as far as the man of Elohim and then let me return.”**

²³ Yet he replied, **“For what reason are you going to him today? It is neither a new moon nor a sabbath.** She answered, **“All is well.”**

²⁴ So she saddled the jenny and said to her lad, **“Lead on and go. You must not restrain my riding save I say so to you.”**

²⁵ Then she went on and came to the man of Elohim at Mount Carmel. It came to be, as the man of Elohim saw her in the distance, he said to Gehazi his lad,

“Behold, this Shunammitess! ²⁶ Now run, I pray, to meet her and say to her, ‘[1] Is all well with you? [2] Is all well with your husband? [3] Is all well with the child?’”

She said, **“All is well.”**

²⁷ When she came to the man of Elohim at the mountain, she held fast to his feet. Then Gehazi came close to thrust her away. But the man of Elohim said,

“Hold yourself back from her; for her soul is bitter in her. Yet Yahweh Himself has obscured it from me and not told me.”

²⁸ Now she said, **“Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, you should not put me at ease?”**

²⁹ So Elisha said to Gehazi,

“Gird your waist, take my support-staff in your hand and go. In case you should come upon anyone, you must not bless him; in case anyone should bless you, you must not answer him. And you must place my support-staff on the face of the lad.”

³⁰ Then the mother of the lad replied, **“As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I shall not leave you.”** So Elisha arose and went behind her.

³¹ As for Gehazi, he passed on before them and placed the support-staff on the face of the lad. Since there was no voice and no attention, he returned to meet him and told him, saying, **“The lad did not awake.”**

³² When Elisha came to the house, behold, the lad was dead, lying on his couch. ³³ So he came in, closed the door about the two of them and prayed to Yahweh.

³⁴ Then he got up and lay on the child and placed his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, his palms on his palms. As he lay prone on him, the boy’s flesh became warm.

³⁵ Then he turned away, walked once here and once there in the house, got up and lay prone on him. Now the lad sneezed as many as seven times. And the lad was unclosing his eyes.

³⁶ Elisha called Gehazi and said: **“Call this Shunammitess.”** So he called her, and she came to him. Now he said, **“Lift up your son.”**³⁷ When she entered, she fell at his feet and prostrated herself to the earth. Then she lifted up her son and went forth. [end text]

Verse 18. This narrative occurred some years after verses 8–17. We do not know how old the boy was when this event took place, but he was old enough to help in the fields, probably doing light work. The word “lad” meant a child, perhaps 10 years old, or a young teenager. He helped in the fields with the general process of reaping an unspecified crop in the field.

Verse 20. The son, who was a special gift from God, died in her arms. All children are gifts from God: **“Behold, sons are an allotment from Yahweh; The fruit of the belly is a reward”** (Psalm 127:3). The King James Version translates **“allotment”** as “gift.” Most modern translations render it “heritage” or “inheritance.”

Verse 21. She laid him on the bed in Elisha’s room.

Verse 23. **“All is well”** is *“shalom”* in Hebrew, and it means “peace.” Did she lie to her husband?

Verse 26. Elisha’s three quick questions indicated he sensed something was wrong. Each instance of the word **“well”** is *“shalom.”* Did she lie to Gehazi? It seems that she did, so she could speak directly to Elisha. He was a prophet and she knew that. After all, he correctly predicted the birth of her son. Was she afraid she would be dismissed by Elisha? Was she afraid she would be given instructions, but she wanted Elisha to act personally to deal with her son’s death? **She did what was necessary to speak to Elisha personally.**

Verse 27. Elisha did not know her son was sick and died. Knowing the ways of YHWH, I think Elisha understood God’s withholding knowledge of the son’s death from him might be a lesson to him as well as to others.

Verse 28. She reminded Elisha that she did not ask for a son. In fact, she had asked for no favor from him. Yet now the wonderful favor of her only son was lost to her by his death.

Verse 29. Elisha ordered Gehazi to do something that seems strange. He rushed off while Elisha and mother of the dead boy followed behind.

Verse 30. She still trusted Elisha, but did not want to be separated from him.

Verse 31. Gehazi did as he was told, but to no avail. The boy remained dead.

Verse 32. Elisha traveled from Shunem to Mt. Carmel. A period of travel time transpired between verses 31 and 32.

Verse 34. One indicator of death is when a body approaches the surrounding air temperature. A rising temperature as described indicated a return to life. Remember, the boy had been dead for some time.

Verse 35. He sneezed! Seven times! Elisha must have been elated. Did he ever question the outcome?

Verse 36. God through Elisha lifted the boy back to life. Then Elisha commanded the Shunammitess to lift up her son. We will meet the Shunammitess again later in the Book of Second Kings.

This section recalls Elijah’s restoration of the Sidonian widow’s dead son in 1 Kings 17:17–24. Those considering this narrative would have wondered, will God honor Elisha’s request to restore life as He did for Elijah? The answer was yes. The two stories are different enough for us to understand that both events happened, but with different circumstances. The repetition was intentional.

These two Old Testament instances of the dead being raised by God through prophets were precursors to Christ and the apostles raising the dead back to physical life. All such events are precursors to the eventual raising up of all the dead whoever lived. God is not only the Creator, He brings the dead back to life.

TEXT: Two Miracles Involving Food

2 Kings 4:38–44

³⁸ As for Elisha, he returned to Gilgal. There was the famine in the land, and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him. Elisha said to his lad, “Set the large pot on the hearthstones and cook a stew for the sons of the prophets.

³⁹ Then one of them went forth into the field to glean herbs. He found a field vine and gleaned field colocynth gourds from it, fully filling the fold of his cloak. When he came back, he sliced them into the pot of stew; for they were not acquainted with them.

⁴⁰ So they poured it out for the men to eat. Yet it came to be as they ate from the stew that they cried out and said, **“Death is in the pot, O man of the One, Elohim!”** And they were not able to eat.

⁴¹ He replied, **“Then procure meal.”** He flung it into the pot and said, **“Pour out for the people, that they may eat.”** And there was nothing evil in the pot.

⁴² A man was coming from Baal-shalishah, and he brought to the man of Elohim bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley bread, and new crop grain, in his knapsack. And Elisha said, **“Give it to the people that they may eat.”**

⁴³ Yet the one ministering to him replied, “How shall I put this before a hundred men?” He answered, **“Give it to the people that they may eat; for thus said Yahweh: ‘They are to eat and to have surplus.’”**

⁴⁴ So he put it before them, and they ate. They had a surplus according to the word of Yahweh. [end text]

Verse 38. Two miracle narratives come next. The first begins soon after the lad’s resurrection.

Verse 41. Again, this was a preview of messianic actions. The purifying of poisoned food by God through Elisha prefigured Jesus turning water into wine. Both involved the change of chemical components which was done with the help of God the Creator.

Verse 42. The second miracle narrative begins. Did the man travel from Baal-shalishah to Gilgal where Elisha and the sons of the prophets were located? We cannot be sure, but it seems to be the case. Gilgal was where a group of **“the sons of the prophets”** was gathered for the earlier miracle (verse 38).

Verse 44. They ended up with more bread than when they started.

Although it is not stated in the Gospels, this miracle must have been remembered by the apostles, disciples, and the people when Jesus fed the multitudes in Galilee (Matthew 14:13–21, 15:32–39; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; and John 6:1–15). Jesus’ miracles were on a larger scale involving thousands of people, much greater than Elisha’s miracles. As the *Matthew Henry Commentary* notes for Second Kings Chapter 4, God through Elisha performed five practical miracles that gained public notice and recognition with many witnesses viewing the results:

1. He multiplied the poor widow’s oil, verses 1–7.
2. He helped the good Shunammite woman have a son in old age, verses 8–17.
3. He raised that dead child to life, verses 18–37.
4. He healed the deadly stew, verses 38–41.
5. He fed 100 men with twenty multiplied small loaves, verses 42–44.

There will be other miracles of Elisha in a future article.

TEXT: Elisha Heals Syria’s Military Chief

2 Kings 5:1–14

¹ Naaman was chief of the military host of the king of Syria; he had become a great man before his lord and reputable; for through him Yahweh had given safety to Syria. As for this man, he was a valorous master, though a leper.

² Once Syrian raiders went forth and captured a young maiden from the land of Israel; and she came to be before Naaman’s wife. ³ She said to her mistress, **“Oh that my lord were before the prophet who is in Samaria. Then he would recover him from his leprosy.”**

⁴ So he [Naaman] came and told his lord [the King of Syria], saying, **“Like this and like that spoke the maiden who is from the land of Israel.”**

⁵ The king of Syria replied, **“Go. Set out and let me send a scroll to the king of Israel.”**

Then he [Naaman] went and took in his hand ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold and ten changes of garments. ⁶ He brought the scroll to the king of Israel, saying, **“Now as this scroll comes to you, behold, I send my official Naaman to you that you may recover him from his leprosy.”**

⁷ It came to be when the king of Israel had read the scroll that he tore his garments and said,

“Am I Elohim to put to death and to keep alive? For this one is sending to me to recover a man from his leprosy. Only realize and see now for yourselves that he is seeking an occasion against me.”

⁸ It came to pass when Elisha the man of Elohim heard that the king of Israel had torn his garments, then he sent to the king, saying, **“Why did you tear your garments? I pray, let him come to me, and he shall realize that there is a prophet in Israel.”**

⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the opening of the house of Elisha.

¹⁰ Now Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying: **“Go, and you will bathe in the Jordan seven times that your flesh may be restored to you; and be clean.”**

¹¹ Yet Naaman was wrathful and walked away. He said,

“Behold, I had thought to myself that he would come forth, yea come forth; and he would stand and call on the Name of Yahweh his Elohim; he would wave his hand toward the place and recover the leprous spot. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the streams of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Should I not bathe in them, and I would be clean?”

So he turned around and went away in a fury. ¹³ But his servants came close and spoke to him. They said:

“My father, had the prophet spoken to you of a great thing, would you not do it? Yet, indeed, he has but said to you, ‘Bathe and be clean!’”

¹⁴ So he went down and dipped in the Jordan seven times according to the word of the man of Elohim.

Then his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young lad, and he was clean.

[end text]

Verses 1. Naaman had **“given safety to Syria.”** Given his position as commander of the Syrian army, did he lead the king’s forces to a great victory over an enemy? Perhaps the enemy was Israel, Judah, or both; or perhaps the enemy was from the north, perhaps the Assyrians who were rising in power at this time. Whatever the case, YHWH caused Naaman to be a hero to his people and to be given a reward by his king.

The Jewish historian Josephus perhaps adds a fact to the scriptural account of Naaman. When the Syrian army under Ben-Hadad fought the armies of Israel and Judah (1 Kings 22:29–40), Josephus names the crucial actor in the battle that led to the death of Ahab, King of Israel (1 Kings 22:34).

“... a young nobleman belonging to king Benhadad, whose name was Naaman; he drew his bow against the enemy, and wounded the king [Ahab] through his breastplate, in his lungs.”

• *Antiquities of the Jews 8:414*

This would explain why Elisha had a strange interaction with Naaman, not wishing to address him directly. Elisha was a patriot of Israel and the people. If Josephus’ evidence is true, then the King of Israel was Jehoram, son of Ahab (2 Kings 3:1), and the King of Syria was Benhadad.

Verse 3. The Israelite maiden was certain Elisha, **“he would recover him,”** him being her master.

Verse 4. Naaman’s wife must have told her husband and he spoke to his king.

Verses 5–6. Naaman **“brought the scroll”** on behalf of the King of Syria. This would explain the anxiety of Israel’s king. He was face-to-face, perhaps, with the man who killed his father Ahab, the commander of Syria’s army (who might be spying), who delivered a letter from the rival and sometime enemy King of Syria “asking” for a favor? This was unusual and the King of Israel was suspicious. We the readers would not be surprised.

Verse 7. Note that the King of Israel is not named.

Verse 9. We are not told where Elisha’s house was: in the capital Samaria, nearby, or in another town?

Verse 10. Elisha’s instructions were strange. If he made the requirements absurd, perhaps Naaman might reject them, which he did initially. Perhaps this was what Elisha wanted.

Verse 11. The text says, “**Naaman was wrathful and walked away.**” His anger was understandable. He came to Elisha’s house and the prophet refused to meet him face to face. This was an insult! If he were in Syria he would punish Elisha, but Naaman cannot kill a prophet of Israel within Israel, the very man he hoped would heal him. Furthermore, such an act would cause an “international incident” between kingdoms, and maybe even war. Perhaps Naaman learned from the servant girl attending his wife about Elisha’s miracles (which were from God).^a So, what could Naaman do? He walked away.

Verse 12. To the people living near them, most streams were life-giving resources, and most rivers and streams were honored. He considered the two streams in his homeland to be equal to those of the Jordan River. The text repeats the sentiment from verse 11, “**he went away in a fury.**”

Verse 13. The logic of “**his servants**” was undeniable. Their argument basically was, you have nothing to lose. The Israelite maiden only wanted good for Naaman, so too his servants wanted good for him. He must have been a good man and well liked, otherwise they would not have spoken so directly.

Verse 14. He listened to them, did what Elisha said to do — seven times — and he was healed.

The sequence of events in this narrative section demonstrates how God arranges circumstances for His will to be done among people:

1. **A servant**, a maiden Israelite girl, likely a slave, told her Syrian mistress, Naaman’s wife, about Elisha.
2. The wife told Naaman, who probably questioned the Israelite maiden himself.
3. Naaman told the Syrian king.
4. The Syrian King wrote a letter to the King of Israel accompanied by a gift, to bring Elisha to Naaman.
5. It does not say the King of Israel told Elisha. It seems that the prophet heard about it from gossip.
6. Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman with instructions.
7. Insulted, Naaman refused to act.
8. Naaman’s **servants** took a risk and encouraged him to perform Elisha’s instructions.
9. Naaman did as his servants suggest.
10. **The result:** God healed Naaman.

In a sense, lowly servants were the heroes at the beginning and toward the end of this account. They risked censure and perhaps beatings from their masters if things had turned out badly. Yet they laid the groundwork for all the decisive actions of this narrative.

Consider this healing of Naaman as an illustration of how God operates behind the scenes on our behalf. To bring about His ultimate goal of the salvation of all human beings and the reconciliation of all creatures to Himself (1 Timothy 2:4, 4:10; Colossians 1:16–20 and Philippians 2:10–11), God uses flawed and poorly informed children of His to act on His behalf — to do “works” on His behalf — to assist in small ways to bring about that salvation and reconciliation (Philippians 2:13–14).

As children of God, as babes in Christ, often all we can do is plant seeds in the minds and memories of people about the truths of God, reinforced by loving actions. Our acts on their behalf will be recalled by them later, at a time of God’s choosing. That is what the servants did in this narrative of Naaman’s healing. In this case, the seeds they planted were effective. For us, the seeds we plant (our “works”) might not be acted upon

^a Also, Naaman might have heard what happened to two Israeli military detachments of 50 soldiers who tried to seize the prophet Elijah and were killed by fire from heaven (2 Kings 1:8–17). Elisha’s reputation for many healings and other matters was also known to Naaman through his wife’s servant girl, which were no doubt reinforced by local Israelites as he traveled to the Israelite capital city.

when we plant them, perhaps they will not be remembered in this lifetime, but they will fulfill God's purpose.

When the people we affect in our lives are resurrected to God's judgment to be instructed and learn, as you are being instructed and learn from God's word, then all such contacts we have had after God opened our minds and hearts, will be brought to their minds. They will remember that God did have people who risked censure to tell them the truth of God. Then they will listen and their hearts and consciences will be open to God's healing to accept His love and the righteous actions of His son.

"For the One, Elohim, shall bring every deed into judgment concerning all that is obscured, Whether good or whether evil."

• *Ecclesiastes 12:14*

If you think this verse can be dismissed because it came from the old lecher King Solomon, think again. The apostle Paul quotes this verse of Ecclesiastes:

"For all of us must be manifested in front of the dais [the judgment seat] of Christ, that each should be required for that which he puts into practice through the body, whether good or bad."

• *2 Corinthians 5:10*

Yes, our good deeds will be judged, not just our bad actions toward people. Ecclesiastes was written before anyone understood how God would save mankind through Jesus the Messiah's atonement and justification. Those resurrected to physical life in the great white throne judgment will also be judged for their good acts, not just for evil they have done. As Paul wrote, God **"is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will"** (Ephesians 1:11), and that includes His righteous judgments upon every person who ever lived.

TEXT: Naaman's Gifts, Gehazi's Failure ... and Punishment

2 Kings 5:15–27

¹⁵ Now he returned to the man of Elohim, he and all his camp. He came and stood before him and said:

"Behold, now I realize that there is no Elohim in all the earth save in Israel. And now, I pray, take a blessing gift from your servant."

¹⁶ Yet he replied, **"As Yahweh lives before Whom I stand, I shall not take it."** Though he was urging him to take it, he still refused.

¹⁷ Then Naaman said:

"If not, let, I pray, your servant [Naaman is referring to himself] be given a pair of mules' load of soil of the ground. For no longer shall your servant make an ascent offering or sacrifice to any other elohim, but rather to Yahweh."

¹⁸ **As for this matter may Yahweh pardon your servant: When my lord [the Syria king] enters the house of Rimmon to bow down there and he is leaning on my hand so that I must bow down at the house of Rimmon — when I have to bow down at the house of Rimmon, may Yahweh I pray, pardon your servant on this score."**

¹⁹ Elisha said to him, **"Go in peace."**

So he went away from him some distance in the land. ²⁰ Then Gehazi the lad of Elisha the man of Elohim said:

"Behold, my lord has kept back this Syrian Naaman so as not to take from his hand what he brought. As Yahweh lives, but rather will I run after him and take anything from him."

²¹ So Gehazi pursued following Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he swooped down from the chariot to meet him and said, **"Is all well?"** ²² He replied,

"It is well. My lord has sent me, saying: 'Behold, just now two lads of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Do give them, I pray, a talent of silver and two changes of garments.'"

²³ Naaman said, **“Be disposed and take the two talents.”** He was urging him and bundled two talents of silver in two handbags with two changes of garments. Then he gave them to two of his lads that they might carry them before him.

²⁴ When he came to the fort, he took them from their hand, laid them up in the house, dismissed the men, and they went away.

²⁵ When he was entering and stood before his lord, Elisha said to him, **“From where are you coming, Gehazi?”** He replied, **“Your servant went neither whither nor thither.”**

²⁶ Then Elisha said to him:

“Did not my heart go with you just as the man turned to get off his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to procure silver and to procure garments, olive groves and vineyards, flocks and herds menservants and maidservants?”

²⁷ Now Naaman’s leprosy, it shall cling to you and to your seed for the eon. Then he went forth from his presence, leprous as snow. [end text]

Verses 15. After being healed, Naaman did not just go away. He went again to Elisha. This time Elisha spoke face to face with Naaman before Elisha’s neighbors and the sons of the prophets, as well as Naaman’s servants and soldiers (**“all his camp”**). All listened to God’s miraculous healing.

Naaman was thankful and returned to Elisha’s house to praise YHWH to Elisha. He confessed that YHWH was the only Elohim. This was remarkable for a Gentile pagan, a recent worshipper of many gods to make such a statement. He offered Elijah **“a blessing gift”** in thanks for his part in his healing.

Verse 16. Elisha refused the gift. Perhaps he did not want to receive a gift from an enemy of Israel. We are not told the reason. Naaman tried again to offer gifts, perhaps several times, but Elisha refused.

Verse 17. Naaman seemed to want Israelite soil to pray on, or so it seems to say. He will not willingly sacrifice to a god other than the true God YHWH. This Gentile and former pagan is more committed in his worship of YHWH than Elisha’s own countrymen in Israel (and Judah).

Verse 18. Naaman even begged YHWH’s pardon (and Elisha’s) for going to a pagan temple with his king, saying he will only bow down to the god Rimmon to assist his king. It will not be an act of worship for him, merely a service to his king as a trusted official.

Verse 19. Elisha does not respond positively or negatively to Naaman. The best he can say is, **“Go in peace,”** a common Hebrew statement of farewell.^b Naaman goes without any recorded comment. Did Elisha’s statement mean he or YHWH approved of Naaman’s intention? The text simply says that Naaman left.

The words **“some distance in the land”** likely means Naaman’s company was still in the Kingdom of Israel and had not yet entered Syrian territory.

Verse 20. Gehazi’s name means “Valley of Vision,” perhaps indicating that he had a quick understanding.

Verse 27. Woe! Leprosy came upon Gehazi and his descendants for his lies, a punishment appropriate to the situation. This curse against Gehazi recalls King David declaring a curse upon the descendants of Joab, including leprosy (2 Samuel 3:28–29). Lepers again figure below in this article.

Of course the audience of these texts noted comparisons with earlier events. Elisha was a faithful servant to his mentor Elijah the prophet and prospered. Gehazi was an unfaithful servant of Elisha and suffered for it. We encounter Gehazi later in Second Kings. He will survive as a leper and even prospers to advise the King.

The article “Naaman” in *Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* gives insight to this Naaman and Elisha interaction:

“The case of Naaman was designed by God to shame Israel out of their half-heartedness toward Jehovah by a witness for Him the most unlikely. God's sovereign grace, going beyond Israel and its many lepers to heal the Gentile Naaman, Jesus makes to be His justification for His not doing as many miracles in His own country as He had done in Capernaum, an earnest of the

^b For **“go in peace”** as a Hebrew farewell or a sendoff, Genesis 26:29, 44:17; Exodus 4:18; Judges 18:6; 1 Samuel 1:17, 20:42, 25:35, 29:7; 2 Samuel 15:9; 2 Kings 5:19; Mark 5:34, Luke 7:50, 8:48; Acts 16:36; and James 2:16.

kingdom of God passing from Israel to the Gentiles; Luke the physician (Luke 4:23-27) appropriately is the evangelist who alone records it.”

Jesus referred to this healing of Naaman’s leprosy in the Gospel of Luke just after He correctly applied a major messianic passage to Himself in his hometown synagogue (Luke 4:14–23). Jesus replied to them:

“And He said to them, ‘Undoubtedly you will be declaring to Me this parable: Physician, cure yourself! Whatever we hear occurring in Capernaum do here also in your own country.’ Now He said,

‘Verily, I am saying to you that not one who is a prophet is acceptable in his own country.

Now of a truth I am saying to you, that many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when heaven is locked for three years and six months, as a great famine came to be over the entire land, and to none of them was Elijah sent, except into Sarepta of Sidonia [Sidon, a Phoenician Gentile city], to a widow woman.

And many lepers were in Israel under Elisha the prophet, and none of them is cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

• **Luke 4:24–28**

All in the synagogue reacted with fury at hearing Jesus declare Himself to be the Messiah using comparisons to Elijah and Elisha. The people then tried to kill Jesus (verses 29–30).

The only Gospel author to recall this account of the Gentile Naaman was Luke ... a Gentile and a doctor.

TEXT: The Miracle of the Floating Ax Head

2 Kings 6:1–7

¹ The sons of the prophets said to Elisha:

“Behold now, the place where we are dwelling before you is too narrow for us. ² Let us go, we pray, as far as the Jordan, and let us take from there, each man, one rafter. Let us build there for ourselves a place to dwell there.”

He replied, **“Go.”**

³ Then one of them said, **“Be disposed, I pray, and go with your servants.”** He replied, **“I myself shall go”;**
⁴ and he went with them. So they came to the Jordan and severed timber.

⁵ It came to be while one of them was felling his rafter that the iron ax head fell into the water. He cried out and said, **“Alas, my lord, it was borrowed.”**

⁶ The man of Elohim asked, **“Whither did it fall?”** So he showed him the place; and he fashioned a piece of wood, flung it there and caused the iron to float.

⁷ Then he said, **“Lift it for yourself”;** so he put forth his hand and took it out.

[end text]

Verse 1. This is a simple but unusual story. Why was it included or significant? Perhaps it showed again Elisha’s care for people. **“Before you”** may mean the old narrow dwelling was close to Elisha’s house.

Verse 6. Why would fashioning a wood likeness of an ax head cause the heavy metal ax to float to the surface to be recovered? I do not doubt the event is accurately described, but I do wonder as most people do.

Now we proceed from one man’s personal adventures to political adventures involving the Kingdom of Syria and the northern Kingdom of Israel.

TEXT: Elisha Captures Syrian Soldiers

2 Kings 6:8–23

⁸ As for the king of Syria, he came to fight against Israel; and he counseled with his officials, saying, **“At such and such a place shall be my camp.”**

⁹ Yet the man of Elohim sent to the king of Israel, saying, **“Beware of passing this place, for there the Syrians are settled.”** ¹⁰ So the king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of Elohim had spoken to him. He warned him that he be on guard there, not once and not twice.

¹¹ The heart of the king of Syria was tossed by a tempest over this matter; and he called his officials and said to them, **“Will you not tell me who quoted us to the king of Israel?”**

¹² One of his officials replied, **“No one, my lord the king; yet Elisha the prophet in Israel is telling the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber.”**

¹³ So he [likely the Syrian king] said, **“Go and see where he is. Then I shall send and take him.”** When one told him, saying, **“Behold, in Dothan,”** ¹⁴ he sent there horses and chariots, a heavy army. They came at night and encompassed the city.

¹⁵ Now the one ministering to the man of Elohim rose early to get up, and he went forth, and behold, an army was surrounding the city with horses and chariots. Alas, my lord, his lad asked him, **“how shall we act?”** ¹⁶ Elisha replied, **“Do not fear, for those with us are more than those with them.”**

¹⁷ Now Elisha prayed and said, **“O Yahweh, uncloseth, I pray, his eyes so that he may see.”** Yahweh uncloseth the eyes of the lad, and he saw, behold, the hill was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

¹⁸ When they came down toward him, Elisha prayed to Yahweh and said: **“Smite, I pray, this nation with dazzled perception.”** So He smote them with dazzled perception according to the word of Elisha.

¹⁹ Then Elisha said to them, **“This is not the road, and this is not the city. Follow after me, and let me lead you to the man whom you are seeking.”** So he led them to Samaria.

²⁰ It came to be as they entered Samaria that Elisha said, **“O Yahweh, uncloseth the eyes of these men so that they may see.”** Yahweh uncloseth their eyes, and they saw; behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

²¹ Now the king of Israel said to Elisha, as he saw them, **“Shall I smite, shall I smite, my father?”** ²² He replied,

“You must not smite them. Did you capture those with your sword and with your bow that you would smite them? Place bread and water before them that they may eat and drink and then go back to their lord.”

²³ So he made a dinner for them, a great dinner. They ate and drank; then he dismissed them, and they went back to their lord. Syrian raiders did no longer continue to come into the land of Israel. [end text]

Verse 8. The King of Syria is unnamed. Was this the king who sent Naaman to be healed? Was Naaman still in charge of the armed forces? We cannot know.

Verses 9–10. Elisha warned the King of Israel about an ambush. He did so more than twice.

Verse 11. The Syrian king was bewildered and angry. He thought, I must have leaks in my administration who were informing the Israelites about my actions.

Verse 12. Elisha’s reputation (because of Naaman and other prophetic actions) made him the target of the Syrian king’s revenge. They concluded correctly that Elisha gave the Israelites the information about Syrian plans. Let’s capture Elisha(!), a man who supernaturally knows our plans. (What could possibly go wrong?)

Verses 13–14. Elisha’s location in the city of Dothan was known to the Syrians. It was not far from the capital of Samaria. The Syrians moved a quick and strong force to surround Dothan. They were very efficient.

Verses 15–16. Elisha’s lad was near panic, but Elisha knew better. God protected them.

Verse 17. The lad was given sight of what the Syrians could not see, a supernatural army with supernatural horses. They were real, but not physical, yet able to war in the physical realm on command.

Verse 18. Elisha prayed that God smite the enemy — not with death, but with a blindness of not perceiving their surroundings accurately. Interesting? Absolutely.

Verse 19. At first glance, Elisha seemed to lie to them. In fact he is not lying. They wanted to be taken **“to the man whom [they were] seeking.”** Elisha did what he said he would do.

Verse 20. Elisha prayed to YHWH their eyes would open to see properly, and they saw. They found

themselves at the city of Samaria, in front of Elisha, the King of Israel, and more troops than their own number surrounding them.

Verse 21. Israel's king asked Elisha if he should kill them all. Remember that King Ahab was criticized by a man of God for not destroying the Syrian army of Benhadad (probably an earlier Benhadad) in 1 Kings 20:28–43. The conclusion is in verse 42:

“Then the prophet said to him [Ahab], Thus speaks Yahweh: ‘Because you let go out of your hand the man under My doom, your soul will be for his soul, and your people for his people.’”

• 1 Kings 20:42

If the King of Israel was Jehoram, which is likely, he did not want to make the same mistake his father Ahab made. So, he asked Elisha, **“Shall I smite”** them? This time he was smart enough to ask God's prophet.

Verse 22. Elisha said no, you did not capture them, therefore do not kill them. Instead, feed them and send them away. They were God's prisoners and Elisha's, not the king's prisoners. They were likely disarmed and told they were at the mercy of Israel's soldiers.

Verse 23. The raiders stopped coming into Israel — at least for a while. Of course, they later invaded.

TEXT: Samaria Besieged

2 Kings 6:24–7:2

²⁴ After this it came to pass that Ben-hadad king of Syria convened his entire force and marched up and besieged Samaria. ²⁵ There came to be a great famine in Samaria; and behold, they were besieging it until a donkey's head came to eighty shekels of silver, and a fourth of a cab of seed pods to five shekels of silver.

²⁶ When the king of Israel came to pass along on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, **“Do save us, my lord the king!”**

²⁷ He said, **“Must not Yahweh save you! From where should I save you? From the threshing floor or from the winevat?”** ²⁸ The king asked her, **“What have you to say?”** She replied,

“That woman said to me, ‘Give up your son, and we shall eat him today. And my son we shall eat tomorrow.’ ²⁹ So we cooked my son and ate him. Then I said to her on the next day, ‘Give up your son, and we shall eat him.’ But she hid her son.”

³⁰ It came to be when the king heard the woman's words that he tore his garments as he was passing along on the wall; and the people saw, behold, sackcloth was about his flesh inside. ³¹ And he said, **“Thus may Elohim do to me, and thus may he add, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on him today.”**

³² Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him, when the king sent ahead a man from his presence. Ere the messenger came to him, he himself said to the elders,

“Do you see how that son of a murderer sends to take my head away? See, as the messenger comes, close the door. And you will keep the door pressed close against him. Is there not the sound of his lord's feet behind him?”

³³ While he was speaking with them, behold, the king was coming down to him and said, **“Behold, this is the evil from Yahweh. Why should I wait for Yahweh any longer?”**

¹ Elisha replied, **“Hear the word of Yahweh! Thus speaks Yahweh: ‘About this time tomorrow a seah of flour will sell for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel in the gateway of Samaria.’”**

² The adjutant on whose hand the king was leaning answered the man of Elohim and said, **“Even if Yahweh were making crevices in the heavens, could this thing come to pass?”**

Elisha replied, **“Behold, you will be seeing it with your own eyes; yet you shall not eat from what will be there.”**

[end text]

Verse 24. We do not know how much time passed since 2 Kings 6:23 above. The King of Syria is named, Benhadad (alternately spelled Ben-hadad), a dynastic name. Several Syrian kings had that name. Samaria was

the capital city of the Kingdom of Israel. The Syrians came in full force and surrounded the city. Again, there did not seem to have been any warning. One wonders, didn't the Israelite leaders ever learn?

Verse 25. There was a famine in Samaria, meaning within the besieged city. Did the attack cause the famine? Or, was the famine already occurring and it was one reason the Syrians were successful again in taking the Israelites by surprise? It seems the famine was only within the besieged city.

Verse 26. Benhadad was named but the Israelite king was not. Why this name game? The writer of First and Second Kings was probably the prophet Isaiah, who wrote from documents and histories that were compiled and put in sequence. He wrote about events that he thought were important. Were the names of the kings originally in his source documents? Or, was there a reason the King of Israel was not named in this particular narrative?

Verses 26–27. A woman cried out to the king for help. He had nothing to help her with, or to help anyone. The king disparaged and blamed YHWH and said to her, if YHWH will not help you, how can I help you?

Verses 28–29. It seems that the woman pointed to another woman while speaking to the king. She told her depraved saga of horror. She was more concerned about the unfairness of the other woman not living up to their bargain than the fact that she murdered, cooked, and they ate her son.

Such things were prophesied to happen by Moses if the people of Israel violated their covenant with YHWH. Out of several warnings about the consequences of rebellious disobedience, note this clear warning by YHWH through Moses:

“If by this you should not hearken to Me, and you go contrary to Me, then I will go contrary to you in fury. And I Myself, indeed, will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. You will eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall you eat.”

• **Leviticus 26:27–29**

This warning and punishment were to come after many other warnings and lesser punishments. It is a continual threat to Israel of future punishment for disobedience, particularly for outright rebellion against YHWH. The statement of the king of Israel was an example. He disparaged YHWH's name while he and the people of the kingdom continued to worship other gods besides YHWH.^c The king blamed YHWH.

Verse 30. The king had enough horror. He acted out by ripping his garments which showed him wearing sackcloth under his outer clothes. Sackcloth was a thick garment of coarse dark wool, worn as a sign of mourning and sometimes repentance. Repentance was not evident with the king at this time, as we will see.

Verse 31. The king wanted to blame someone. He targeted Elisha. He wanted Elisha dead. Why?

- (1) Was it because Elisha as a prophet of YHWH convinced the king to release a sizable force of the Syrian army who previously invaded Israel (verses 8–23 above).
- (2) Was it because Elijah did not warn him about the coming attack (but then neither did the prophets of the pagan “gods” give any warning to the king).

Would the King of Israel have heeded Elisha's warning about a Syrian attack? After all, he had not heeded Elisha's warning about the danger of his sins and the sins of his people against YHWH. Israel still had an important covenant duty to worship YHWH only.

The realm was now suffering another surprise attack. Such attacks make kings appear incompetent and weak. It is their job to protect the kingdom. After all, enemy preparations often become known, especially to prophets of YHWH. Did Israel have no spies in Syria, or loyal merchants to sound the alarm? Were there no border outposts or guards; were all of them taken by surprise? As a result, no defense preparations were made, no supplies gathered, no counterattack organized. The king did not blame himself, but he wanted Elisha dead.

^c Review the “[Introduction to Isaiah](#)” where Dr. Ernest Martin discusses YHWH's five-fold increasing punishments set out by Moses and occurring as the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah slide into idolatry, rebellion, and depravity. The punishment predicted in Leviticus 26:27–29 was seven times more intense than the previous punishment. It was fulfilled in Second Kings chapter 6. It will not be the last time Israel will suffer such punishments.

Verse 32. Elisha was inside the city of Samaria, “**sitting in his house**” meeting with the city elders, when the messenger approached, perhaps to kill or capture Elisha. Elisha tells his guests to bar the door against the messenger. Elisha had better warning than the whole Kingdom of Israel.

Verse 33. The king arrived, berating YHWH again. He proclaimed he cannot wait for YHWH’s salvation.

Verse 1. Elisha gave a prophecy. The next day and there would be plenty of food and the famine will end.

Verse 2. An adjutant is a military assistant. He supported the king who was perhaps weakened by the famine or overcome with emotion about his starving people. The adjutant also disparaged YHWH. Elisha then makes another prediction specific to the adjutant. He shall see the food, but eat none of it.

TEXT: The Siege Ends

2 Kings 7:3–20

³ Now four men who were lepers were at the portal of the gateway. They said, each man to his associate, “**Why are we sitting here until we die? ⁴ If we had said, Let us enter the city, with the famine in the city, we would have died there. Yet if we sit here, we will also die. So now come and let us swoop down to the Syrian camp. If they keep us alive, we shall live. If they put us to death, then we will die.**”

⁵ So they got up in the twilight to enter the Syrian camp. When they came as far as the outposts of the Syrian camp, behold, there was no one there.

⁶ For Yahweh Himself had caused the Syrian camp to hear the sound of chariots, the sound of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said, each man to his brother, “**Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Musri [Egyptians] to come against us.**” ⁷ So they got up and fled in the twilight. They forsook their tents, their horses and their donkeys, the entire camp just as it was, and they fled for their souls.

⁸ When those lepers had come as far as the outposts of the camp, then they entered one tent; they ate and drank; they carried from there silver, gold and garments and went off and buried them. They returned and entered another tent and carried off what was there. Again they went and buried it.

⁹ Then they said, each man to his associate,

“**What we are doing is surely not right. This day, it is a day of good tidings, and we are hushing it up. If we tarry until the morning light, then depravity will come upon us. So now come, let us enter and tell the king’s household.**”

¹⁰ Then they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city and told them, saying,

“**We came into the Syrian camp, and behold, no one was there or human sound, but only the tethered horses and the tethered donkeys, and the tents just as they were.**”

¹¹ Then the gatekeepers called out and told this inside the king’s household. ¹² The king arose by night and said to his officials,

“**Now let me tell you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we are famishing. So they went forth from the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they are coming forth from the city, then we shall apprehend them alive, and we shall enter into the city.**”

¹³ One of his officials answered and said,

“**Now let them take five of the remaining horses that have remained here. Behold, they are doomed like the whole throng of Israel who remain in it. Behold, they are like the whole throng of Israel who will come to end. So let us send, and let us see.**”

¹⁴ Now they took two chariots with horses, and the king sent them out after the Syrian camp, saying, “**Go and see.**” ¹⁵ They went following them as far as the Jordan; and behold, the entire road was full of garments and implements which the Syrians had flung away as they were hurrying away. Then the messengers returned and told the king.

¹⁶ Now the people went forth and plundered the Syrian camp. So a seah of flour was sold for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel, according to the word of Yahweh.

¹⁷ The king himself gave supervision over the gateway to the adjutant on whose hand he was leaning; and the people tramped him down in the gateway, so that he died, just as the man of Elohim had said when he spoke as the king came down to him.

¹⁸ Thus it came to be as the man of Elohim had spoken to the king, saying, **“Two seahs of barley will be sold for a shekel and a seah of flour for a shekel about this time tomorrow in the gateway of Samaria.”**

¹⁹ Yet the adjutant had answered the man of Elohim and said, **“Even if Yahweh were making crevices in the heavens, could this thing come to pass?”** and Elisha had replied, **“Behold, you will be seeing it with your own eyes; yet you shall not eat from what will be there.”**

²⁰ And so it came to be for him; for the people tramped him down in the gateway, so that he died.

[end text]

Verse 3. Here lepers play an important role in the storyline. There are different kinds of leprosy, and these four lepers seem to say they might have been allowed in the city. Yet God’s proscription in Moses’ day says different, and should be in effect in the city of Samaria, especially during a siege:

“Instruct the sons of Israel that they shall send away from the camp every leprous human and everyone having a discharge and everyone defiled by a deceased soul. Both male and female shall you send them away outside the camp. You shall send them away so that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I am tabernacling.”

• **Numbers 5:2–3**

Verse 4. The lepers discussed the risks or benefits of dying one way or another, inside or outside the city.

Verse 5. They decided to risk going to the Syrian camp. The soldiers were gone from the outposts.

Verse 6. The writer narrates and tells us what happened. The soldiers earlier in chapter 6 had their sight and perceptions “dazzled” so they could not see properly. Now YHWH caused the Syrian soldiers to hear sounds like those of a large army approaching.

Verse 7. So the Syrians fled, all of them, including their commanders, leaving everything behind.

Verse 8. The lepers ate and then looted whatever they wanted, then buried their new-found treasures. They went to another tent. It seems they could tell which were the more lucrative tents.

Verse 9. Their consciences began to bother them and they decided to tell the king’s men about their find.

Verse 10. The lepers did the noble thing and told the gatekeeper up on the gatehouse parapet what they found. They spoke from the ground, outside the gate.

Verse 11. The gatekeepers went to tell the king, who ordered the lepers brought before him. Because they were lepers, they likely spoke with the king across a courtyard, so they would not get too close.

Verse 12–13. The news was too good to be believed, so the king overanalyzed the situation. Thinking it to be a trap he needed to be prodded to check if the information from the lepers was true. The response by one official was, in effect, we have nothing to lose by sending someone to check the story of the lepers.

Verse 14. This expedition risked an enemy trap, especially so because their horses were debilitated by lack of food, and probably could not run fast.

Verse 15. The farther they traveled from the city toward the Jordan, they must have felt more relieved. The Syrians had fled. They checked all the way to the Jordan River.

Verse 16. When the people heard the good news they rushed for the gates to get the food and livestock left behind by the Syrians. God’s prophecy by Elisha was fulfilled precisely.

Verse 17. The adjutant supporting the king was then trampled in the gateway also as Elisha predicted.

Verses 18–19. Elisha’s prophecies are repeated from verses 7:1–2.

Verse 20. Salvation came to the city, death came to the adjutant of the King, just as Elisha predicted.

In the next article: “Israel and Judah: 27” You will read more of God’s miracles through Elisha, and learn what happened to Elisha’s former servant Gehazi.

David Sielaff, October 2017