

SECOND KINGS

Chapter 6

The Axe Head Recovered

Now the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, “See, the place where we dwell under your charge is too small for us. 2 Let us go to the Jordan and each of us get there a log, and let us make a place for us to dwell there.” And he answered, “Go.” 3 Then one of them said, “Be pleased to go with your servants.” And he answered, “I will go.” 4 So he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. 5 But as one was felling a log, his axe head fell into the water, and he cried out, “Alas, my master! It was borrowed.” 6 Then the man of God said, “Where did it fall?” When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick and threw it in there and made the iron float. 7 And he said, “Take it up.” So he reached out his hand and took it.

6:1 *too small.* Under Elisha’s leadership, the number of prophets was likely growing. (TLSB)

6:2 *Jordan.* Prophetic center was likely at Jericho, not far from the “thicket of the Jordan” (2:4–8; Jer 12:5). (TLSB)

place where we dwell. Some have suggested that the company of prophets lived in a communal housing structure. The Hebrew for this phrase, however, could be translated “a place there for us to sit,” referring to some type of assembly hall. It is implied in 4:1–7 that there were separate dwellings for the members of the prophetic companies. (CSB)

6:5 *it was borrowed.* At that time an iron axhead was a costly tool, too expensive for the members of the prophetic company to purchase. Having lost it, the borrower faced the prospect of having to work off the value as a bondservant. (CSB)

He would have to pay for the lost axe head. (TLSB)

6:6 *Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float.* The Lord demonstrated here his concern for the welfare of his faithful ones. (CSB)

As in other examples (2:21; 4:41), God worked a miracle through Elisha’s symbolic action. The stick, which would naturally float, leads the axe head to float as well. (TLSB)

6:1–7 With a miracle of compassion through Elisha, the Lord delivers a son of the prophets from debt. We have similar concerns today. Yet, the Lord cares about every aspect of our lives, as Jesus’ compassion toward His disciples showed. Greater still, the Lord removes the debt of our sin by the wood of His cross.

- Lord, lead me to use my property and the property of others wisely, that I may share Your compassion with others. Amen. (TLSB)

Horses and Chariots of Fire

8 Once when the king of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants, saying, “At such and such a place shall be my camp.” 9 But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, “Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are going down there.” 10 And the king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God told him. Thus he used to warn him, so that he saved himself there more than once or twice. 11 And the mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing, and he called his servants and said to them, “Will you not show me

who of us is for the king of Israel?" 12 And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." 13 And he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and seize him." It was told him, "Behold, he is in Dothan." 14 So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city. 15 When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16 He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Please strike this people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha. 19 And Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria. 20 As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw, and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. 21 As soon as the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down?" 22 He answered, "You shall not strike them down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." 23 So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel.

6:8 *Once when.* Hbr indicates nonchronological order of this collection of events from Elisha's life. (TLSB)

warring against Israel. A reference to border clashes rather than full-scale hostility. Some indication of Israelite weakness and Aramean strength is seen in the ability of the Arameans to send forces to Dothan (only about 11 miles north of Samaria) without apparent difficulty (see vv. 13–14). (CSB)

Elisha miraculously foiled two Syrian attacks on Israel (6:8–23; 6:24–7:20). (TLSB)

6:9 *king of Israel.* Probably Joram (see 1:17; 3:1; 9:24). (CSB)

6:10 *to the place.* An Israelite reconnaissance party verified the truth of Elisha's disclosures. Elisha's information was so accurate, the Syrian king was convinced there was a traitor among his servants (v 11). (TLSB)

used to warn. Prophets could act as court counselors. (TLSB)

6:11 *which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?* Repeated evidence that Israel possessed advance knowledge of Aramean military plans led the king of Aram to suspect that there was a traitor among his top officials. (CSB)

Syrian leader feared an Israelite spy had infiltrated his government. Israel had used spies in the past. Cf Nu 13; Jsh 2. (TLSB)

6:12 *Elisha ... tells the king.* The Syrian's comment reveals that he, too, had contacts with the Israelite court. (TLSB)

bedroom. Hyperbole. (TLSB)

6:13 *capture him.* The king of Aram thought he could eliminate Elisha's influence by denying him contact with Israel's king. (CSB)

Ignoring Elisha's special ability to know his plans, the king commanded a special mission. Cf 1:9–14. (TLSB)

Dothan. Located on a hill about halfway between Jezreel and Samaria, where the main royal residences were (see 1:2; 3:1; 8:29; 9:15; 10:1; 1Ki 21:1). (CSB)

20 mi W of the Jordan. See map, p 581. Controlling a pass through the mountain (v 17) of the Carmel Ridge, Dothan lay on the road from Syria to Egypt on which the Ishmaelites took Joseph to the land of the pharaohs (Gn 37:17). (TLSB)

6:14 Rather than sending spies or a discreet force, the Syrian king fully invaded Israel, encountering no opposition along the way. (TLSB)

6:15 *servant.* Perhaps Gehazi. Cf 4:12. (TLSB)

6:16 *Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.* Elisha knew that there was greater strength in the unseen reality of the hosts of heaven than in the visible reality of the Aramean forces (see 2Ch 32:7–8; 1Jn 4:4). (CSB)

Luth: "Where there are twenty devils, there are a hundred angels, and if that were not so, we should long since have perished. We are on the battle front whenever we teach the Word, whenever we preach and glorify Christ, and then live, as far as possible, according to the Gospel and the Word of God" (AE 12:227). (TLSB)

6:17 *mountain was full of horses and chariots.* In response to Elisha's prayer, his servant was able to see the protecting might of the heavenly hosts gathered about Elisha (see Ge 32:1–2; Ps 34:7; 91:11–12; Mt 18:10; 26:53). (CSB)

Normally unseen by human eyes, "the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Ps 34:7). Chem: "If our eyes were opened, as Elijah's were ... then we might live our lives in greater concern and in fear of God" (*LTh* 1:175). Luth: "Christ does not want us to be alone on the road of death, from which all men shrink. Indeed, we set out upon the road of suffering and death accompanied by the entire church.... All that remains for us now is to pray that our eyes, that is, the eyes of our faith, may be opened that we may see the church around us. Then there will be nothing for us to fear, as is also said in Psalm 125 [:2], 'As mountains are round about it, so the Lord is round about his people, from this time forth and forever.' Amen" (AE 42:163). *horses and chariots of fire.* No matter how invincible the forces of evil may appear, they never are a match for the heavenly hosts at God's command (Mt 26:53; Rm 8:31). *around Elisha.* As the leader of the Lord's prophets, Elisha received a special detachment of guardian angels. Luth: "It is a great comfort for all Christians to learn from these and other passages of Holy Scripture that they are not forsaken in the cross which they encounter in various forms throughout their lives. For they have the dear angels with them as protectors and guards. Furthermore, God is always present with His gifts, although one angel would really suffice to cope with all the enemies. ... Wherever faith prevails and the divine Word is treasured, there we find such radiance shining into our hearts that I have a clear vision of God as my Father, of the open heaven, of the angels about me, and of the help that is mine. Such a precious possession is ours in God's Word and in the Christian faith" (AE 22:210–11). (TLSB)

6:18 *Struck them with blindness.* Elisha had prayed for the eyes of his servant to be opened to the unseen reality of the heavenly hosts; now he prays for the eyes of the Aramean soldiers to be closed to earthly reality (see Ge 19:11). (CSB)

Prayer is ironic, given Elisha's prayer for sight in v 17. (TLSB)

6:19 *This is not the way and this is not the city.* Elisha's statement led the Aramean soldiers to believe that they were being directed to the city where Elisha could be found. Technically this statement was not an untruth, since Elisha accompanied them to Samaria, but it was a means of deceiving the Aramean soldiers into a trap inside Samaria, the fortress-like capital city of the northern kingdom (see Ex 1:19–20; Jos 2:6; 1Sa 16:1–2 for other instances of deception recorded in the OT). (CSB)

led. The prophet personally led the Syrian army. (TLSB)

to Samaria. Distance of c 10 mi S of Dothan. Samaria was the capital of Israel. (TLSB)

6:20 *they were in midst of Samaria.* The power of the Lord operative through Elisha turned the intended captors into captives. (CSB)

6:22 *not strike them down.* In reality the Aramean soldiers had been taken captive by the power of the Lord, not by Joram's military prowess. The Lord's purpose was to demonstrate to them and their king and to the Israelites and their king that Israel's national security ultimately was grounded in the Lord, not in military forces or strategies. (CSB)

Elisha, as the Lord's servant, sets a standard for treating prisoners. Ambr: "Elisha gained more renown by pardoning than he would have done by slaying, and preserved those enemies whom he had taken for greater usefulness" (NPNF 2 10:82). (TLSB)

6:23 *great feast.* Not prison food. Israel provided exceptional treatment. Cf Pr 25:21. (TLSB)

Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel. Temporarily the Arameans recognized the futility of opposition to the power of the God of Israel. (CSB)

Seems contradicted in 6:24–7:20, but the miracles are not arranged in chronological sequence. This may be a relative term meaning that the Syrians did not raid Israelite territory as long as a conciliatory spirit lasted. (TLSB)

6:8–23 Through Elisha's leadership, the Lord compassionately settles a war between Syria and Israel. In these events, the Lord teaches us about having mercy on our enemies. When in conflict, prayerfully consider how you might use your strength to pursue peace. Consider that, when we were enemies with God due to our sin, He sought peace with us in the compassionate ministry of Jesus, who gave His life for us. • O Lord, surround us with the care of Your holy angels, that we may not fear but act confidently and compassionately, through Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

Ben-hadad's Siege of Samaria

24 Afterward Ben-hadad king of Syria mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria. **25** And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver. **26** Now as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!" **27** And he said, "If the LORD will not help you, how shall I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the winepress?" **28** And the king asked her, "What is your

trouble?” She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.’ 29 So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him.’ But she has hidden her son.” 30 When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes—now he was passing by on the wall—and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body— 31 and he said, “May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today.” 32 Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Now the king had dispatched a man from his presence, but before the messenger arrived Elisha said to the elders, “Do you see how this murderer has sent to take off my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold the door fast against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?” 33 And while he was still speaking with them, the messenger came down to him and said, “This trouble is from the LORD! Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?”

6:24 *Ben-Hadad*. The same Ben-Hadad who had besieged Samaria on a previous occasion. This siege is probably to be dated c. 850 B.C. (CSB)

besieged. Common strategy that often brought brutal results. Because ancient warfare did not necessarily have “rules” of war, cities were hesitant to surrender, anticipating horrific treatment and slaughter. (TLSB)

6:25 *donkey’s head*. According to Pentateuchal law the donkey was unclean and not to be eaten (see Lev 11:2–7; Dt 14:4–8). The severity of the famine caused the inhabitants of Samaria not only to disregard the laws of uncleanness, but also to place a high value on the least edible part of the donkey. (CSB)

Normally scorned as food, it sold at highly inflated prices. (TLSB)

dove’s dung. Possibly the name of a plant that ordinarily was not eaten. In some sieges, people could be driven to seek nourishment from various kinds of excrement. (TLSB)

6:27 *If the LORD will not help you, how shall I help you?* Joram correctly recognized his own inability to assist the woman if the Lord himself did not act in Israel’s behalf, but he wrongly implied that the Lord was to be blamed for a situation brought on by Israel’s own disobedience and idolatry. (CSB)

The king of Israel blamed God for the suffering to disguise his own shortcomings. (TLSB)

threshing floor ... winepress. Out of reach. Outside the city walls. (TLSB)

6:28 *we may eat him today*. The sins of the king and people were so great that the covenant curses of Lev 26:29 and Dt 28:53, 57 were being inflicted (cf. La 4:10). (CSB)

6:29 *boiled my son*. Woman does not simply regret the loss of her son but complains that she unfairly did not get to eat the other woman’s son (cf 1Ki 3:16–26). During the final siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (587 BC), “compassionate women ... boiled their own children” (Lm 4:10; 2:20). (TLSB)

6:30 *tore his robes*. More an expression of anger toward Elisha and the Lord (see v. 31) than one of repentance and sorrow for the sins that had provoked the covenant curse. (CSB)

sackcloth. A coarse cloth usually worn as a sign of mourning (see note on Ge 37:34). It is not clear why Joram wore sackcloth hidden under his royal robe. Perhaps it was a testing of the Lord, a private ritual to attempt to gain divine favor. (CSB)

6:31 *May God do so to me and more also. be it ever so severely.* A curse formula. (CSB)

God's deed in the vow is not specified but perhaps is illustrated by the tearing of the clothes or the threatened beheading of Elisha. Since the king cannot punish God, he will punish His prophet, who had likely counseled against surrender. (TLSB)

if the head of Elisha ... remains on his shoulders today! Joram considered Elisha in some way responsible for the conditions in the city. Cf. Ahab's attitude toward Elijah (1Ki 18:10, 16; 21:20). (CSB)

6:32 *his house.* In city of Samaria. (TLSB)

messenger. Hbr *mal'ak*, often translated "angel." In this case, an executioner. (TLSB)

the sound of his master's feet behind him? The Lord showed Elisha that the king regretted his command and was rushing to stop the executioner. (TLSB)

6:33 *the messenger came.* Compressed sentence means "the messenger came down and [the king who came down immediately behind him] said," etc. (TLSB)

Why should I wait for the LORD any longer? Joram felt himself deceived by Elisha and abandoned by the Lord, whom he blamed for the disastrous conditions in the city. (CSB)

Elisha apparently had promised God's intervention. (TLSB)

6:24–33 The Syrians impose a horrific and frustrating siege upon Samaria, causing the Israelite king to blame God and Elisha for the suffering. When you suffer, you will be tempted to blame the Lord or the Church for evil that you witness. May God strengthen you to resist temptation and to call on the Lord with a broken heart. Like the elders of Samaria, seek consolation and direction from God's prophetic Word, which does not fail. The Suffering Servant, Jesus, knows the depth of your trials. He will bear your sins and griefs as your beloved Savior. • Weeping Jesus, hear my cry, and deliver me from my sins and from all evils. Amen. (TLSB)