

OpenTheo

2 Kings 5 - 6



2 Kings - Steve Gregg

In this text, Steve Gregg explores the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5-6. Naaman, a Syrian commander with leprosy, is healed by Elisha the prophet. Gregg notes that the ancients did not differentiate between serious skin conditions and lesser ones, and that God was not typically in the business of doing miracles for pagans. Naaman is ultimately healed when he obeys Elisha's command to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River. The text also explores the story of the siege of Samaria and the cannibalism that ensued during a time of great famine.

Transcript

Okay, we're going to now put in at 2 Kings 5 the story of Naaman, the Syrian commander who had leprosy and came to Elisha the prophet. There are many things about this story that are thought to have a connection with New Testament truth. And as I said, Elisha, in my opinion, is a picture, a type of Christ.

Not in everything he did, of course. Those in the Bible who are said to be types of Christ are only types of Christ in certain aspects, not in all aspects. But I believe that much that we read of in the story of Elisha connects with ideas from the Gospels, from the New Testament.

This one in particular, I think, says, Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him Yahweh had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. It's interesting that it says that Yahweh had given victory to Syria through the instrumental leadership of this man, Naaman.

Now this man was not necessarily someone who knew Yahweh, nor necessarily did the king of Syria know Yahweh. There were times when God wanted to judge Israel by the hands of other nations, and so God would give victory to the other nations over Israel, because it was His purpose to judge Israel. He certainly says that about Himself in Isaiah 10, when He talks about the Assyrians.

Now here we're reading about the Syrians, not the same as the Assyrians, but in Isaiah

10, the Assyrians are seen as being drawn by God down into Israel to judge Israel for its sins. And there were times when apparently Syria was used for the same purpose by God, and the writer is saying that when Syria, you know, defeated Israel, this was God's doing. Now they may not have acknowledged it, they may have even given the credit to their own gods, but the writer of Kings says, no, that was Yahweh that did that.

And so because Yahweh had used this man Naaman to give victory to Syria, he was highly respected. He was a highly decorated general in his country, in the military of Syria. But the problem is he was a leper.

Now, in Israel, a person with leprosy would be excluded from normal society, could not be with other people. A leper in Israel would have to have no contact with other people, and live out in a leper colony, or else live out alone. And no one was allowed to come near them.

If someone came near them, they were supposed to cover their mouth and their mustache with their hand, and say, unclean, unclean, so that people would know, I'm not going to breathe on you, you can't come close to me, I'm highly infectious. And by the way, that understanding, which is found in Leviticus 13 and 14 about lepers, was way before its time, in terms of scientific knowledge. It wasn't until Pasteur, in recent centuries, proved that infectious disease is caused by the spread of microbes, that anyone really understood how people caught diseases.

And yet, the laws that God gave about lepers, that they had to be separated, and no one could get near them or touch them, reflects God's knowledge of what was not yet discovered by scientists. And that was that, you know, contact with people with infectious diseases will spread that disease. In old times, they figured that someone who had leprosy would have just received a stroke from God.

In fact, sometimes it was the case, he struck Miriam with leprosy briefly, and then healed her at Moses' intercession. God's going to strike Gehazi with leprosy before this story is over. God did strike some people with leprosy as a judgment, but they knew of no other means by which a person would get leprosy.

And therefore, Israel's law, being enlightened as it was, by God's knowledge of the situation, required that lepers would be separated from the rest of society so it wouldn't spread. Syria apparently didn't have that kind of enlightened laws. This man had leprosy, but he was still serving the king.

The king would still lean on his arm to worship in the temple of the god Rimmon. He still lived in his home with a servant girl who knew and could advise him to go see Elisha the Prophet. He still traveled with an entourage.

He met with Gehazi and later with Elisha himself. So here's a leper who's not really

isolated, probably owing to the different laws of Syria from those of Israel. Now, we have to realize that the word leprosy today, in our age of scientific precision, refers to a particular disease that has a name, a certain microbe, a certain virus that is associated with a particular disease, a disease of the flesh, which is called Hansen's disease.

This is incurable. Well, I guess not anymore. I've understood that in recent times, in recent times they have found cures for Hansen's disease, but in biblical times, and in most times, Hansen's disease was an incurable condition.

But not all skin conditions were Hansen's disease. Not all, you know, psoriasis and, I mean, there's different kinds of dandruff and things like that were a skin condition that the ancients didn't know how to differentiate between, you know, a lesser skin condition and a serious one. And therefore, there was in the law, in Leviticus 13, instructions for a man who had a white patch of skin or flaky skin on his arm or something that appeared he'd have to go and be examined by the priest and put in quarantine.

They have to see if it would spread or if it would go away over time. And if it spread, it was called leprosy. Now, this doesn't mean it was necessarily Hansen's disease.

It could have been some other kind of spreading skin problem. Leprosy was a cover term for any kind of spreading skin problem that defied analysis according to the knowledge of the time. No doubt, many cases of what they called leprosy in those days was the same thing we call leprosy and was Hansen's disease.

But it would not always be the case. If a person simply had flaky skin that didn't go, that didn't cure itself easily, they would be considered a leper. That was one of the ways they'd be diagnosed.

So this man might or might not have had full-scale leprosy as we use the term today, but he would nonetheless have been quarantined if he were in Israel. With whatever condition he had, he would not be able to operate in regular society, though he was doing so in Syria. Whatever the problem was, it was one that he had no solution for.

The doctors available to him had not been able to cure him, and therefore he had a rather hopeless case of this disease. And the Syrians had gone out on raids and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife, so a young teenage girl in all likelihood now was a prisoner of war and was a servant in the kitchen of Naaman's household.

And she became aware of her master's skin problems, and she was a gracious girl. She didn't resent the people who'd taken her captive. She accepted her fate and seemed to be concerned about the well-being of their family.

And she said to her mistress, If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, for he would heal him of his leprosy. This was simply a statement of faith based on

knowing the potential power of God. There was no known case previously where either Elijah or Elisha had ever cured leprosy, or anyone else for that matter except Moses, which was centuries earlier.

But this girl just believed that the prophet of God could do just about anything that needed to be done. In a case like this, leprosy that was hopeless by natural means to cure, certainly the God of Israel operating through his obvious servant, the prophet Elisha, could heal him. And she was sure of that, not because she ever never had heard a case of it happening, but because she just had confidence in God and in God operating through the prophet.

She said, I know that prophet would heal him. Perhaps she thought that because Naaman was a good man also. I mean, he was a Syrian.

Generally speaking, God wasn't in the business of doing miracles for pagans. He did most of his miracles for Israel. But she apparently was impressed with Naaman as a good man, one that God would no doubt have pity on.

Even the prophet Elijah, though the Syrians were enemies of Israel, and Elisha was an Israelite, he would have no doubt wanted to help this man, she felt, if he was known to them. And Naaman went in and told his master saying, thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel. So the king of Syria said, go now and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.

So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Now we're talking about hundreds of pounds of silver and gold, and that's a lot of money. This was a king's gift to another king.

This was sent not to Elisha, this was sent to the king of Israel. The Syrian king and Naaman didn't have any idea where Elisha was. They just knew he was in Israel somewhere.

They assumed, no doubt, that he would be in the service of the king. They didn't understand that Elisha and the king, they were adversarial toward each other. Most of the kings had prophets in their employment.

And we saw that Ahab, even, when he worshipped Baal, had 450 prophets of Baal in his employment. And so it was common for kings to have an entourage of prophets in their staff. And so apparently the king of Syria, not knowing otherwise, felt that this prophet who could cure leprosy must be in the king's employment.

And so he sent his gift to the king of Israel. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised when this letter comes to you that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. And it happened when the king of Israel read the letter that he tore his clothes and said, Am I God to kill and

make alive that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? What a strange request that is for a foreign king to send to your king.

I'm sending you this guy, please heal him of leprosy. Well no one can do that. And so of course the king of Israel assumes that this is a subtle provocation to war.

Like saying, do this for me and if you can't I'll be angry to fight with you. Therefore please consider and see how he seeks a quarrel with me. So it was when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes that he sent to the king saying, Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot and he stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be restored to you and you shall be clean. Then Naaman became furious and went away and said, Indeed I said to myself he will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of Yahweh as God and wave his hand over the place and heal the leprosy.

Are not the Abana and the Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. Now Naaman is very much like the sinner in need of salvation. He's got a condition that no one can heal except God.

It's possibly, potentially a fatal condition. If it's real leprosy, if it's if what he had was actually Hansen's disease, then it was a fatal condition. It would kill him and it would spread.

It would not get better, it would get worse. Just like, I mean that's like sin to the unbeliever. They're born in sin, it's a something that will eventually kill them and it won't get worse, it won't get better.

It'll only spread and infect more and more of their character, more of their lives, unless they get healed of it, unless they get cured, unless they get saved in other words. And by the way, salvation, which many people unfortunately believe is simply a means of getting your sins forgiven and getting a ticket to heaven, actually is supposed to be a cure from sin. Not just an absolution from sin, but a cure.

The angel said to Joseph, you should call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. And sin itself in the life is like a leprosy of the body, like a cancer, like a disease that spreads and is incurable by human means, only curable by God. So here's Naaman who has heard that there's a God in Israel and that he can heal, that this prophet can heal.

Now he expected the prophet to appear at the doorway and do some kind of hocus-

pocus and wave his hand over it and heal it in some dramatic way. Instead the prophet didn't even appear, he just sent his servant. This was like a slight to Naaman.

He took it as a slight, you know, I'm an important man, can't the prophet come and speak to me himself? How can we just send some flunky to come and convey a message to me? There's a sense in which that's how God brings the gospel to us, through his flunkies, through his messengers. We don't really get to see Jesus. We, I mean, most people don't.

Some people have visions of Jesus like Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, but most people have to get it through a messenger. Sometimes an unimpressive messenger, someone that doesn't impress them and so they just put off by it. They say, well, you know, God could do better than this.

This person who's supposed to be a Christian, supposed to be God's agent, this person is telling me I'm supposed to obey Jesus, then if that's the best there is, I, you know, unless Jesus will come to me directly, I won't believe him. That's what our atheist friends say. They say, if God would just appear, then I'd believe.

Well, that's not what God chooses to do. Deal with it. If he could, if he wanted to appear, he could.

He apparently doesn't want to. Elisha could have come to the door himself. That wasn't his choice.

He was apparently not wanting to show the kind of deference that the proud man wanted to have shown to him. He was testing the man's pride, and the man failed the test. He was proud.

He was offended. God may test our, the pride of the unbeliever by sending Christians with the true message from God, but a messenger who's unimpressive. Maybe someone who's not as educated.

Somebody who's not as perfect as they think a man of God should be. But nonetheless, the message comes not directly from the mouth of Jesus, but through his sermons to most people when they're being evangelized. And what is the message? In this case, dip yourself seven times in the Jordan River.

Dip, in the Septuagint, the Greek translation is baptizo, baptized. Same word that's used in the New Testament for baptized, as used here in the Septuagint. He's basically saying get baptized, which obviously has connections to New Testament salvation ideas as well.

Although, of course, he says seven times. There's a lot of sevens. The child who was raised from the dead, in the previous story, sneezed seven times.

Now he's told to baptize himself seven times. Seven is just the number of completeness. It's associated with God and his perfection.

And the number seven is often used simply to make a symbolic connection to God. This is a command of God. But it also means completeness.

Dip yourself a complete number of times. Now this might have sounded like you saying just keep dipping yourself until you're better. In any case, the man said, that won't work.

We've got better rivers than the Jordan where I live. You know, the rivers in my country, they're as good as this river. And if dipping in water is all it takes to cure this disease, I could do that at home.

And therefore, the instructions were too simple. It seemed like it just couldn't work. I mean, obviously, a physician had done for him things far more elaborate than just washing him in water.

And what even the more elaborate cures had not done any help. Certainly water, he'd washed himself many times before. He knew from experience that water wouldn't wash this away.

So he thought it was too simple. Had to be something more mystical than that to do. Some waving of the hands, some hocus-pocus, some incantation, some wing of bat eye of newt.

Something that had to be more impressive than just ordinarily dipping yourself in water as you would when you're bathing. And so, he rejected the instructions. And there are, of course, people who are looking for salvation, but the gospel message is unappealing to them because it is essentially too simple.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. Just a matter of surrendering. Just a matter of giving in to God and letting him be in charge of your life.

It's not a matter of doing a lot of elaborate rituals. People love rituals, especially religiously oriented people love rituals. They just seem so holy.

They seem so mystical. Or some people feel like, you know, I'd have to really clean up my act and start doing a lot of good works before I could be saved. And they think it should be harder than it really is made out to be in Scripture.

And so they, because it's too simple, they don't do it. And that's what this man was doing. It was a very simple set of instructions.

Easy to do. Too easy for his liking. And his servant came near and spoke to him and said, my father, which is just a term of respect for their master, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more when he says to you,

wash and be clean? In other words, you wanted him to tell you to do something much more difficult, much more elaborate, much more impressive.

And he didn't. He just told you something simple. But you would have done something much harder if he'd said do it.

Why don't you do the simple thing and see what happens? So he was persuaded and he went down. He dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the sayings of the man of God. And his flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child.

And he was clean. It's like he was born again. He became like a child.

And he was now clean. The leprosy was gone. He was saved.

So all of this is quite a clear analogy, it seems to me, to salvation as we find it described in the New Testament in Christ. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him, just like that one leper came back to Jesus when he was cured. Nine didn't.

Remember Jesus cured ten lepers and nine of them went off and didn't thank him. But one came back to express his appreciation. Naaman could have just gone home and enjoyed his good health, but he wanted to go back and thank the man of God and show his appreciation.

And he stood before Elisha. This time Elisha apparently did appear to him, didn't just send a servant out to meet him. Because he stood before him and he said, Indeed now I know that there is no God in all earth except in Israel.

Now therefore please take a gift from your servant. But Elisha said, As Yahweh lives before whom I stand, I will receive nothing. And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

So that must have been really a good testimony to Naaman, that here he had these camel loads of gifts of gold and silver that he brought. I mean hundreds of pounds of gold and silver. Elisha could have been as rich as a king, but he just said, No I'm not going to take anything from you.

And that would of course have demonstrated his sincerity as a prophet, not just as some kind of a professional guy who uses these powers to make himself rich. And he refused to take anything for what was the gift of God. So Naaman said, Then if not, please let your servant be given two mule loads of earth.

For your servant will no longer offer either burnt offerings nor sacrifice to other gods, but only to Yahweh. So he was truly converted from all of his former paganism and he's now serving God for the rest of his life. Yet in this thing, may the Lord pardon your servant.

When my master goes into the temple of Rimen to worship there, he leans on my hand

and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon. When I bow down to the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing. In other words, it's part of my duties to accompany the king as his main captain, part of his bodyguard no doubt, to go into this pagan temple when he worships.

I'm not going to worship there, but it's part of the ritual I'm supposed to bend down on one knee because the king does. And will the Lord pardon me for this? And Elisha said to him, Go in peace. Which apparently meant he had permission to do that.

So he departed from him a short distance. Now he was going to depart all the way home, but he only got away a short distance before the next part of the story happened. So it's interesting that God is gracious to this man.

He heals him and he recognizes him as a true worshiper. But he allows him still to hold his job in the military, in the government, and even in the ways in which he had to do things that looked like idolatry. But in his heart, he wasn't an idolater.

He said he'd never offer sacrifices to any other God again. His desire to take two mule loads of dirt from Israel back to his land probably is suggesting that he wanted to build an altar, you know, out of clay made from Israel's soil in his own land. That he did not do it from materials in his own land may suggest that he recognized that the idolatry of his own land made their soil polluted, unacceptable.

So Israel had, you know, was the promised land, the God's land. And so to take some of that back home with him and build an altar there simply as a means of honoring Yahweh was what he, that was his way of expressing a desire to serve God. It's a little bit like, you know, we are living in our homeland here, but we are citizens somewhere else.

We have the materials, the gifts from heaven, really. Our citizenship is in heaven and we have gifts from heaven and we worship God using those in this foreign country where we have to live in the meantime. And we even have to live among the heathen.

Now I don't think we, I don't know that a Christian should work in a pagan temple. And there are certain jobs that a Christian should not do. But in this case, special concession was made to him since he was not really worshipping remnant, but he was just required to go through the motions for the king's sake.

The king was worshipping remnant and he was not there to intrude into his king's religious life or interfere with it. He could, he had to worship Yahweh, but he couldn't make anyone else do so. And so he just was able to keep his job as long as he himself was not a worshipper of the false god.

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, look my master has spared Naaman the Syrian while not receiving from his hand what he brought. But as the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him. But it's like that we're being told

this was what was going on in his head.

He was saying it to himself. So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him and said, is all well? And he said, all is well my master has sent me saying indeed just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim.

Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments. So he's saying, well Elisha didn't want anything for himself and he hasn't changed his mind about that. But now that he has some guests, he'd really like to honor these guests and he doesn't really have anything extra.

So could he get some of that gift that you offered him before? Kind of a lame story. But perhaps one that Naaman would not be suspicious of. So Naaman said, please take two talents instead of one.

So this man got two talents of silver given to him. Be over a hundred pounds. And he urged him and bound two talents of silver in two bags with two changes of garments and handed them to two servants, two of his servants and they carried them on ahead of him.

When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand. This is in Samaria. The citadel was the capital city and Elisha was living there.

And he stored them away in the house. Then he let the men go and they departed. Now he went in and stood before his master and Elisha said to him, where did you go Gehazi? And he said, your servant did not go anywhere.

Then he said to him, did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? These were apparently the things that Gehazi pictured himself getting. I think I'll settle down, get myself an olive grove, a vineyard, have male and female servants. I can buy all that and more with this money I've got.

And Elisha says, is this really the time for that? Aren't there things more important than that? Now he doesn't rebuke him for lying. He doesn't rebuke him for the deception. He just rebukes him for having the wrong values.

Although he had lied and that was wrong and he lied to Elisha. He lied to Naaman. He lied to Elisha and of course if Elisha's refusal to take any gifts was part of his testimony to Naaman, he compromised the testimony of God too.

In other words, if Elisha refused because he wanted Naaman to know that God offers his gifts freely and does not charge for them, then of course Gehazi's going with his story

would essentially, you know, nullify that message. Oh, you still owe me something. I need something now.

So please give it now. I didn't want it before but I do now. Well, all of that Gehazi had done and yet he's only rebuked for wanting to better himself financially.

To have servants in the olive yard and in a vineyard and so forth. He says, therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever. And he went out of his presence leprous as white as snow.

Leprosy would make the skin depigmented and white. So he was struck with leprosy immediately, completely. You know, in the law about leprosy in Leviticus, it talks about leprosy starting as a little patch.

Then they watch it for a week and if it grows they have to watch it another week and so forth. And then it's leprosy if it keeps growing. But Miriam was struck with leprosy and she was white as snow instantly.

Just her whole body was white. And that was true also in this case. When God struck him with leprosy it was total leprosy.

Now we do see Gehazi again later on not living in a leper colony. But actually later on there's a story where he's talking to the King of Israel. The King of Israel is actually interviewing Gehazi about some of the mighty works of Elisha.

Which makes us think that maybe Gehazi didn't have the leprosy at that later point. Or else why would the king allow him into his presence? And it does say that the leprosy will cling to you and your descendants forever. And yet maybe maybe that decree was reversed.

Maybe Gehazi repented. Maybe there's some reprieve given to him. Or maybe the story that him talking to the king actually is told out of chronological sequence.

It's hard to say. It's possible that his interview with the king was before this. But in any case we don't really read of Gehazi much.

We do read of a servant of Elisha in chapter 6 on the wall of Dothan. But we don't really know that that's Gehazi or not. Gehazi if he was struck with leprosy and remained leprous would have to be separated from Elisha and from all society.

Chapter 6. And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, see now the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. Please let us go to the Jordan and let every man take a beam from there and let us make there a place where we may dwell. And he answered, go.

Apparently these sons of prophets lived in one big house together. A communal house. And that actually seemed very normal to me in the 70s.

There were lots of single Christians who lived in houses in large groups. I don't know if that still goes on as much as it used to. But during the Jesus movement people who were not married didn't usually live alone.

They lived in groups of other Christians. I always lived in a house with at least 10 or 12 other Christians. Big.

I mean those are not very big. Those are small houses. There were big ones too.

With 20 or 30 Christians living in them. And you know in those days it just seemed like a normal thing to do. You get fellowship all day long and and you share the rent and it's just a good living arrangement.

It's just a you know fellowship was what you're living for in those days. And so that's probably what the sons of the prophets were doing. Just sharing a big house together.

Probably sharing expenses and trusting God for things. And their house was too small now. There were a lot of them.

At one point there were a hundred sons of the prophets. Don't know what size house they had to live in. But this group, we don't know if this was a hundred of them, but there were too many of them for the house that they were in.

So they said we need to build a bigger house. Why don't we all just go down to Jordan and homestead there. Just squat on some property.

We'll cut down some trees and build a house together. So he said that sounds good. Go.

Then one said please consent to go with your servants. And he answered I will go. So he went with them and when they came to the Jordan they cut down trees.

But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron axe head fell into the water. And he cried out and said alas master for it was borrowed. Now an axe head, an iron axe head would be quite a luxury.

Iron was, this was during the Iron Age I guess. It was during time when iron was just starting to be used somewhat and as weapons and stuff. And I mean these in this period of time.

And an iron axe head would be quite a luxury. Like one of the first, like one of the first people to get a television or something when they were first invented. This is, I couldn't afford one of these.

I had to borrow this. This belongs to someone else. And now it's falling in the water and you know it's sunk like iron so I cannot retrieve it.

And the man of God said where did it fall? And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick and threw it in there. And he made the iron float.

Therefore he said pick it up for yourself. So he reached out his hand and took it. So we have to assume that it fell into water that was relatively deep because it was in shallow water.

He'd just go in there and you know search around on the bottom of the riverbed and find it. It must have kind of, he was probably swinging back and flew off the end and went out into the water far enough that it was not likely they could find it. And so making the axe head swim or float was the miracle in this case.

And it seems like a trivial miracle. A lot of miracles that God did were big events. You know, routing armies or opening the Red Sea and those kinds of things.

Causing the Sun to stand still. In this case it's just this guy had a problem. A small problem in the larger scheme of things.

He borrowed an axe head and lost it. Couldn't repay it. Couldn't return it or pay for it.

And yet that was a concern. Every little thing. You know we've seen a number of stories like this that involve the communal life of the lives of the prophets.

The sons of the prophets. And in one case they had a pot of stew and someone put in some bad gourds and there's poison in the pot. In another case there wasn't enough food.

There were 20 buns for a hundred eaters. But in both those cases the prophet Elisha either made the food they had safe to eat or multiplied the food they had. In this case they need a bigger house and he's and that's being provided for.

And a man loses just a piece of equipment and a miracle is wrought to provide its recovery. What we see here is that the ordinary things of life for God's people are being provided for even miraculously when necessary. Now most of the meals they ate were not poison and didn't have to be fixed with putting flour in them.

Most of the time they ate they probably had enough for everyone. Sometimes not. But when they did have needs that couldn't be supplied by normal means, God miraculously intervened.

These were not huge national miracles. These were not history-changing miracles. These are just miracles that express God's interest in the well-being and the needs of his individual people or small groups of God's people in this case.

In this case one man's needs. So God is not tight-fisted with his miracles. He's willing to provide things by miraculous means whenever that's the best way to do them.

There are times when there's not a natural way to fix it so a miraculous way is needed. And I think these stories demonstrate that although there are natural means most the time for feeding ourselves and all there are times when the natural means fail and where God is is on the job. God's paying attention.

God's power is available to make it happen. And he showed his concern for this one man, this unnamed son of a prophet who had a sudden economic crisis. And so God actually used a miracle to remedy the situation.

Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel. And he took counsel with his servants saying my camp will be in such-and-such a place. And the man of God sent to the king of Israel saying beware that you do not pass this place for the Syrians are coming down there.

Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him and he was watchful there not just once or twice. So there were multiple attempts on the part of the Syrians to anticipate the movements of the king of Israel and to lie in wait for him and ambush him and get rid of him.

But God apparently didn't want the king of Israel killed by the Syrians on this occasion. This is probably Jehoram I'm assuming. And so God spared the king.

He told Elisha this is where the danger is. Go tell the king not to go there. So he missed it.

This happened more than once or twice. We don't know how many times, but enough time to begin to look like a pattern. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing.

And he called his servants and said to them will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? There must be someone here conspiring against me. Sending an informant who's sending information to the king of Israel to help him escape my traps. And one of his servants said none my lord or king but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.

Which is a hyperbole of course but it means there's no way there's no place so private that your speech can escape being revealed to Elisha. So he said go and see where he is that I may send and get him. That's the same Elisha that cured Naaman the chief captain.

Yet this king now wants to capture Elisha and you know prevent him from warning the king anymore. He's our problem. He's the informant.

We need to take him out. And it was told him saying surely he's in Dothan. Therefore he sent horses and chariots and great army there.

And they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out. And again we're not told that this is Gehazi so it probably was not.

There was an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him alas my master what shall we do? So he answered do not fear for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. And Elisha prayed and said Lord I pray open his eyes that he may see.

Then 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. These fiery horses and chariots are an emblem of course of the angelic armies. When Elijah was taken up there was a horse and chariot of fire that appeared on that occasion.

Whether it took him up or not is not stated clearly but it's possible that it did. Then he sent angels down. God sent angels down to pick up Elisha and take him home.

What this servant saw of course was not so much that Dothan was surrounded by these by the Syrian armies but that the Syrian armies were surrounded by the angels of God. And this is something that was true before the man's eyes were opened. His eyes opening did not cause it to be true it just made him aware of what was already true.

And that means that though we don't see it the angel of the Lord encamps around about them that fear him and delivers them. As it says in Psalm 34.8 I think it is. So God's angelic powers are dispatched for our protection.

Jesus said he could call on 12 legions of angels to deliver him if he wished. But the angels of God are there to protect God's people. And so even if the visible danger seems great there's an invisible protection that we don't see most the time because we don't have our eyes open to see.

We don't see into the spiritual realm. But faith is the evidence of things that are not seen. If God tells us that the angels are sent to minister to us that the angels protect us though we don't see it faith is the evidence of that being true.

It's the evidence of things that are not seen. This man had his eyes open so he actually could see what was otherwise invisible. And he saw the chariots of the angels and the horses of the angels around these these Syrian armies all around Elisha.

But of course probably well it may be that they were I always picture them as a ring further out than the Syrians. So the Syrians were surrounded. It's possible that these chariots were between the Syrians and Elisha.

It doesn't matter. The point is that they were on duty and they were taking care of matters. And so it says the Syrians came down to him.

Elisha prayed to the Lord and said strike this people I pray with blindness. And he struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. Now this was not so much a judgment because he actually relieved their blindness shortly there afterwards.

This was just a temporary way of bringing them under his in under his control. So Elisha said to them this is not the way nor is this the city. Follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.

Of course he means the king. They were there to seek Elisha but he means I'll take you to the king the one you were seeking on previous occasions. But he led them to Samaria.

So it was when they had come to Samaria that Elisha said Lord open the eyes of these men that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes and they saw and there they were inside Samaria. Now in all likelihood he didn't just leave them with all their armor and swords attached or else they could have started doing some damage to the Israelites there in Samaria.

He probably disarmed them and then brought them into Syria because they the implication certainly is that they were at the mercy now of the king of Israel. And when the king of Israel saw them he said Elisha said to Elisha my father shall I kill them shall I kill them? And he answered you should not kill them. Would you kill those whom you've taken captive with your sword and your bow? These are prisoners of war.

They're not you're not on the battlefield with these people. These are people who are taken captive. You don't just kill captives.

Set food and water before them that they may eat and drink and go to their master. Then he prepared a great feast for them. And after that they ate and drank.

He sent them away and and they went to their master so the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel. That's one way to defeat your enemies is to turn them into friends. You know here the Syrians have been making several attempts on the king of Israel's life and now he's got them at his mercy and he gives them a meal.

Throws a feast for them. Treats them like honored guests and then lets them go. That certainly must have blown their minds.

And it's like turning the other cheek. It turns your enemy into your friend. And it did.

It ended the war for the time being between Israel and Syria. In this Elisha's counsel resembles that of Jesus of course. About loving your enemies.

Do good to those who persecute you. Pray for those who despitefully use you. Do kind things to people who wanted to do bad things to you.

So this is a Christ-like response to one's enemies. And it worked wonders in this case. It

brought peace.

And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his army and went up and besieged Samaria. Now some period of time had passed now because these raids from Syria ended for a period of time. And so we have to assume some time perhaps years have passed now.

And there's another attack on Israel from Syria from Ben-Hadad at this time. And he went up and he besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria.

And indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for 80 shekels of silver. And 1 fourth of a cab of dove droppings for five shekels of silver. Now as far as the exact price of these things it's irrelevant.

The point is that these these undesirable food items were selling for a high price because there was nothing desirable to eat. All the good food was gone. And now people were they wanted a donkey's head.

Now see a Jew couldn't even eat a donkey. It was an unclean animal. Much less the head.

I mean not that the head would be unclean. It's just the whole donkey including the head is unclean. But the head would be an undesirable part of the animal to eat.

Not much meat on there. You know it's mostly bone, skin and bone. But you know it was not a highly valued food item certainly.

In fact to be a repulsive food item. Same thing with doves dung. But they were selling that for people to eat for what is no doubt a high price.

Any price would be high. But the amount that they paid was no doubt given because it is considered to be an exorbitant amount for what is really a you know a low quality substance to fill your stomach. People were starving in other words.

Then as the King of Israel was passing by on the wall a woman cried out to him saying help O Lord my Lord O King. And he said if the Lord does not help you where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor or from the wine press. In other words there's nothing there.

You go to the threshing floor or the wine press there's nothing there. We've got no we've drawn in no food. Why? Well because they were besieged.

You need to remember something that was different in those days than now. And that is that almost all cities have walls around them. And the businesses were in the cities.

But surrounding the cities on the outside of the walls were all the farmlands. And in a time of siege the farmers who lived in those lands would run into the city and the gates

would be shut and the population would be holed up in the city. No one would be out there farming.

They had these walls keeping out the enemy but also separating them from their farms and from their food supplies. They would have some supplies stored up in the city but only a limited amount. If the siege went on for a very long time the people would be starved out.

That was the idea. The besieging army didn't even have to fight. They could just camp out and just wait for the people inside to starve to death and surrender.

And so this is what was going on. He says we don't have any food. We don't have any source of food.

Then the king said to her what is troubling you? And she answered this woman said to me give your son that we may eat him today and we'll eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son and ate him. And I said to her on the next day give your son that we may eat him.

But she has hidden her son. So she's saying make her surrender her son like we agreed. We ate my son yesterday.

She's supposed to let us eat her son today. She's not cooperating. Tell her to give her son up.

Now in Deuteronomy chapter 28 in the law Moses warned Israel that when they were not obedient to God great curses would come upon them. And among them was the curse of eventually eating their own children because of the severity of a siege that they'd come under. In Deuteronomy 28 52 it says they shall besiege you in all your gates until your high and fortified walls in which you trust come down throughout all your land.

They shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you. You shall eat the fruit of your own body the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you. And it goes on even to talk more about the cannibalism up through verse 57.

This is a mark of God's judgment when Israel would be besieged to the point where they had to eat whatever they could and would even be driven to eating each other and even their own children. It had come to that. Now of course we might ask well what was it that Israel was doing at this time to bring this calamity upon them? No special offense is mentioned but we are told all the way through the history that they continued in the sins of Jeroboam.

They were worshiping idols. This was the very thing that God said would bring judgments

upon them. It's just that the judgments were more severe at other times than others.

But their sin was continual. They always deserved the judgments. It's just that God only occasionally brought them with great severity upon them.

This was one of those times. And so it happened when the king heard the words of the woman that he tore his clothes in grief not in repentance. And as he passed by on the wall the people looked and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body.

So he was wearing sackcloth under his royal robes. He was grieved. It seemed like there was some kind of repentance he was trying to manage but it wasn't working.

He had not torn down the gold calves and we'll find that he actually tries to kill Elisha because he's confused thinking that Elisha and Yahweh are apparently the ones that are causing this. It says then he said God do so to me and more also if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today. But Elisha was sitting in his house and the elders were sitting with him.

We're not sure why the elders were there but the elders may have been consulting him. He was after all the man who knew what God had to say and it was a disastrous time so the leaders of the nation other than the king had come over to visit and probably consult with Elisha. The fact that they were there probably prevented the king from immediately executing Elisha since he was no doubt in favor with these people and the king would not be able to you know with their approval just come in and take off Elisha's head.

But why would he want to take off Elisha's head? It would appear that the way the king was thinking is Yahweh has let us down. Yahweh could help us but he won't. Maybe he's not there at all.

Maybe he's maybe we're worship maybe this Yahweh is a false God. Maybe there's some God more powerful than Yahweh that's angry at us because of Yahweh's worship in this country because of Elisha who stands for Yahweh. You see he figured that Yahweh should be delivering them.

He didn't realize apparently that under the law it said that the nation would come under the judgment of Yahweh and these things would happen. I don't know if he felt like this was a judgment from Yahweh and that he's going to get back at Yahweh for it by killing Yahweh's prophet. Like okay God if you're doing this to us we're gonna do this to you.

Kill your prophet. Or if it was rather the presence of a prophet of Yahweh was seen to be offensive to other gods. This is how Christians came under persecution in the Roman Empire in times when there were famines and things like that.

The pagans believed that they were being punished by the gods because the gods were offended by the Christians not worshipping them. And therefore the Christians came

under persecution officially in the Roman Empire and many times because of famines and disasters which the pagans thought were the anger of the other gods at the Christians for not worshipping the other gods. And it may be that this king had these thoughts about Elisha.

Maybe the gods are mad at us because Yahweh's prophet is here and doesn't worship them and advises us not to worship them. It's hard to know what he's thinking. He was kind of probably at his wits end and therefore he wasn't thinking very clearly.

But he decided to take out his wrath on Elisha. And Elisha was sitting in the house and the elders were sitting with him. It says and the king sent a man ahead of him but before the messenger came to him he said to the elders do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look when the messenger comes shut the door and hold him fast at the door.

Is it not the sound of his master's feet behind him? So he knew the king was coming. He knew a messenger was coming. He knew that he was going to take his head.

This is all by divine revelation. God gave him a revelation of this but he was somewhat composed about it. He just said shut the door and don't let him in until the king gets here.

And while he was still talking with them there was the messenger coming down to him. And then he said surely this calamity is from Yahweh. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? That's the message that the king sent by the messenger.

He said this calamity seems to be Yahweh's doing. Why should I wait for him anymore to change anything? And perhaps he's saying you know you want me to worship Yahweh. Well I've been trying to be good.

I've got this sackcloth on and stuff that God doesn't seem to be coming through for me. So why should I worship God anymore? Why should I listen to the prophet of Yahweh anymore? It's not a really obvious reasonable question. It's just the king trying to make an excuse for blaming God and blaming God's prophet for what's going on and for giving up any faith in Yahweh.

Now the story continues but the chapter divides here. And our time being as it is it is it's time for us to take a break. So we this is a strange chapter division.

It would be better probably if the chapter division was two verses later because the the scene changes there. We really are in the middle of a conversation here when the chapter ends but we'll have to stop there and pick it up again next time.