

2nd KINGS

Week 9, chapters 6 and 7

We ended our last lesson on a decidedly down note, as we read in 2nd Kings 6 of a siege by Syria upon the northern Israelite capital city of Samaria. And because of the nature of siege warfare whose goal it is to surround a walled city and essentially wait for the trapped residents to run out of food and supplies, we of course read of terrible famine inside those city walls whereby the people were reduced to eating unclean animals like donkeys and using food stretchers such as carob husks (that have no more nutritional value than sand) that carry the colloquial name of “dove’s dung”.

But what shocks our senses even more is to read about Hebrew mothers killing, cooking, and eating their own children as a means of personal survival. I want to stress that this is not some fanciful horror story designed to elicit strong emotions and disgust. It happened more than once or twice, and it was even foretold in a number of places in the Hebrew Bible that if Israel became too rebellious such a terrible thing would be the result.

Of course this scene is happening in the idolatrous and apostate northern kingdom of Israel, and part of the reason that we are given such gory details is to inform us that Israel had indeed reached such a point of abomination in God’s eyes that drastic action was called for. Remember: in a few more chapters we’re going to find the northern kingdom conquered and emptied of its people as they hit the bottom of the slippery slope they had been descending since Jeroboam had two golden calves built and declared to his people: “These are your gods, O Israel, who led you out of Egypt”.

Do not think I’m suggesting that God caused the siege; but rather it is clear that He had lifted His hand of blessing and protection from this unfaithful people. The siege is not supernatural in its character; rather, from an earthly viewpoint, it is but the typical result of one national monarch seeking to extend his dominion and reach into a rival nation for the purpose of power, glory, and wealth. And this kind of ambition always involves death and destruction.

Let me comment that while one is not directly connected to the other, this siege of Samaria provides a good illustration of the nature of the coming worldwide tsunami of catastrophe that Evangelical Christians call the Great Tribulation. I have taught on the subject before but this would be a good time to briefly summarize: the Tribulation period of the Christians is known to the Jews as the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. Note that Jacob and Israel are the same person and

the terms are interchangeable in the Bible. So from a Hebrew Roots teaching standpoint, I have no pause in calling this awful time of the near future the Time of Israel's Trouble; and in fact I think it helps to put it in that context so that we can better grasp what is being signaled to us so that we can recognize it when it begins.

The English word "tribulation" is translated from the Greek Word *thlipsis*, which means pressure or oppression. Just as the Jewish name for it, the Time of Israel's Trouble, characterizes it, it is a time of prolonged and profound pressure and oppression upon Israel. But as in the siege of Samaria, the trouble is decidedly **not** supernatural, although the solution to it will be. The Tribulation period often gets mixed up with the period of God's wrath that follows it, and perhaps that is because Scripture seems to indicate that for a short duration of the final few days or weeks of the Tribulation period the time of God's wrath overlaps with it.

The period of God's heaven-sent wrath is defined by 21 specific acts of divine, supernatural judgment (or wrath) as written in the Book of Revelation. These have been labeled by the Church as the seal, bowl, and trumpet judgments; 3 named sets of judgments each consisting of 7 supernaturally ordained events of devastation, totaling 21. But these are NOT to be confused with the Tribulation. Just like in the siege of Samaria, the events of the Tribulation are humanly caused. The coming Tribulation is a time when secular humanism bears all of its inevitable ugly fruit and godless tyrants vie for power. This is a time when the evil of men upon other men runs rampant and is unparalleled in human history as it affects the entire world without exception. It is a time when the world has become so pagan, bold and full of hatred that the remnant of Believers becomes a target. And it happens because the world over, the Lord has retracted His hand of blessing and protection, and everyone will more or less equally share in its effects. Let me say it again: the effects of the Tribulation will NOT be of God's supernatural wrath being poured out (that will happen about 7 years from the first days of the Tribulation), but rather its source is human wickedness gone wild as it was in the days of Noah. Now does Satan have his fingerprints all over the Tribulation? Of course. Does God influence matters? Of course. But God's wrath is different from the Tribulation of men's evil.

Let's re-read a small section of 2nd Kings 6, and the siege of Shomron (Samaria).

RE-READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 6:24 – end

King **Y'horam** was walking atop the thick and tall defensive walls of Samaria, looking down upon the enemy on the outside, and his dead and dying people on the inside, when a distraught woman hollered out to him for justice. She had made a devil's bargain with another mother, that each would kill one child, cook it, and then share the degrading meal amongst themselves. First one would act, and then later the second would follow suit. The woman who called to the king had already killed, cooked, and eaten her child but now the other woman

backed out of the deal. The King of Israel, as apostate and unfaithful as he was, nonetheless had not entirely lost his humanity and he fell into anguish and despair upon hearing this woman's tale of woe.

But along with his despair came an irrational anger and urge to blame. Never had Jehoram ever imagined that Hebrew mothers would descend this far to outright cannibalism, but he no doubt knew that this had to be the result of a curse from God. On the one hand he put on the sackcloth of mourning and repentance as a sign of acknowledging that sin was the cause of his nation's plight. But on the other hand he blamed Elisha, as God's greatest agent on earth, and not his own rebellion against the Lord for this sorry state of affairs. In fact, he made a vow invoking the Lord's name that if he didn't have Elisha executed that very day, that his royal self ought to become the next meal for some starving family.

What was Elisha's crime in the king's eyes? Probably it was not for any one thing. It hadn't been too long ago that Elisha brought many Syrian troops to Samaria that had had their perception blinded by God. And as much as Jehoram wanted to kill them, Elisha told him he could not but instead was to feed them and then release them. And now, no doubt, many of those same troops have returned and are surrounding his capital city. **Y'horam** and his father before him hated Elijah and Elisha because they both complained that all either prophet ever brought to them was a harsh word from God and never good tidings. It was believed among people of this era that prophets not only represented gods, but to some degree controlled the gods. And those prophets worked for the kings to do their bidding. So a prophet could (upon his own volition but usually at the behest of his king), pronounce something to happen (a good thing or a bad thing), and then manipulate the god or gods he represents to bring it about. Thus a prophet was thought to have at least an equal hand in bringing about trouble or victory for a king.

Thus to King Jehoram's deluded mind, Elisha could have at least stopped the famine or shortened it, but maybe even prevented it in the first place. After all Jehoram and Elisha were nearly enemies; we've read in numerous places about how much the king despised Elisha, and how little regard Elisha had for the king. So now the king decided that it was time for Elisha to die, and the king dispatched one of his men to assassinate him.

Elisha was sitting in his house (inside the walls of Samaria along with all the others who were under siege), while the king's assassin was on his way to do his duty. But the king seems to have forgotten about Elisha's gift of second sight, and so Elisha knew of the deadly plot. As he was sitting with some of the city's elders, he said to them that this "son of a murder" (meaning Jehoram) has sent someone to behead him. Aware of the situation, Elisha told the elders not to answer the door, but instead to more or less barricade it. And this is because Elisha knew that after the king had made the rash vow to kill him, and even after sending the killer on his way, that the king would change his mind and not want to further antagonize God by killing His greatest Prophet.

Verse 33 says that essentially the king ran and caught up to his henchman and stopped him. And so the king went to Elisha's door and said to him, ""**Here, this evil is from ADONAI. Why should I wait for ADONAI any longer?**"

What the original Hebrew said more literally was: "Behold, this evil is from YHWH. What hope can I have from YHWH?" The gist of the comment is that King *Y'horam* admits that this siege and its terrible effects are the consequence of his and his people's wickedness. So, since God has decided this, it is useless to pray because God has decided, the outcome is certain, and thus there is no hope.

Let's move on to chapter 7.

READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 7 all

What an unfortunate place that Bible editors from times past chose to end chapter 6 and begin chapter 7. Recall that all chapter and verse markers are somewhat arbitrary, and were never there in the original. Usually there is good reason and logic for their choices, but this one is a head scratcher because the scene that ends chapter 6 simply continues without interruption as the 1st verse of chapter 7.

Thus verse 1 is Elisha's conversational reply to King *Y'horam's* remark that since Yehoveh has ordained this calamity (even if He didn't directly cause it) then what hope is there that Yehoveh would relent, and what use is there to even discuss it? And Elisha begins by saying, "Listen to the Word of Yehoveh". The Hebrew is *shema dabbar YHWH*. And the significance of using the word *shema* is that it does NOT mean merely to listen; the more literal English translation is, "hear and obey". *Shema* is not passive listening; it is active doing. And the idea is that the King is to participate in what it is that Elisha says the Lord is going to bring about. The King is to **expect it** to happen, prepare for it to happen, and then to act accordingly. For instance, he should inform his starving people to give them assurance that help will be here in 24 hours. Why didn't he do any of that?

After Elisha explained that by the next day food would be plentiful and thus back to relatively normal market prices, the king's servant (probably the assassin) scoffed at such a prediction and mocked Elisha and God. What Elisha proposed was utterly impossible by any human

rationale. They were under siege, they are in the most severe famine, and even cannibalism has occurred. And the king's servant exclaims incredulously that if the windows of heaven opened and it rained so that the fields could grow, or even if flour and meat fell from the skies there wouldn't be enough.

The rabbis say that had the servant merely insulted Elisha, the prophet would have merely ignored him; but by saying that even heaven couldn't provide he denied God's ability to deliver His people. This is blasphemy and the penalty for blasphemy is death. So the servant's fate was sealed as Elisha shot back that indeed tomorrow this servant will see abundant food, but he'll not live to enjoy any of it. We hear not one word from the King of Israel who was present during this dialogue, so we can safely assume that he held essentially the same sentiments as his faithless servant.

It is a sad reality that we are always tempted due to our imperfect faith and weak trust to either rationalize or discount God's promises. What we see with our human eyes always seems to take precedence over what we see with our spiritual eyes. And the more grand the promises, and the more desperate the situation, the harder time of it that we have to believe and to rely upon the Word of the Lord.

However what separated the greatest Bible heroes from other common but righteous men was that they did believe God that the impossible was possible after all. But would a government representative of an apostate kingdom believe that he could rely on the Lord when he had shunned and even demeaned the Word of the God? The Lord, in His fathomless mercy, had given Jehoram and his servant an opportunity to turn away from unbelief and back to Him, but whether from habit, or a developed instinct, or a sense of not deserving such unmerited grace from the One who had been systematically dishonored for years and years, the servant made light of the promised miracle and thus Elisha delivered the bad news that although he would get to witness the folly of his lack of trust, he would not join in the Lord's bounty for His people.

I think this same scenario happens to everyday Believers with alarming regularity. God gives us every sign of what our direction ought to be, or confirms in many ways that we are the right path, but we either feel that we aren't worthy or we deny the proofs and call them coincidences or we just cannot accept that such marvelous grace could be coming our way because it doesn't seem rationally possible. Some of this is because especially in our day it has become common that Church leaders and Bible scholars no longer believe in divine miracles and so they teach their congregations and students to believe the same. The result is that while we may be allowed to see miracles, it will be from afar and for those who hold a deeper trust, and we will likely be shut out from the benefits.

The story now shifts focus to 4 men who suffered from *tzara'at*. In Hebrew a person who

suffers from **tzara'at** is called a **metsora**. Remember that the reason that a **metsora** had a skin disease in the first place is because the Lord directly gave it to the person because they had an unclean inner spirit and the Lord was exposing their shame for all to see. Now the ancient sages say that the 4 **metsorim** were Elisha's former servant **Geichazi** and his 3 sons. I have no reason to doubt it, but also have no evidence to substantiate such a claim.

By Torah Law, these 4 men must be separated from the community of God.

^{CJB} Lev. 13:45-46

⁴⁵ ***"Everyone who has tzara'at sores is to wear torn clothes and unbound hair, cover his upper lip and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!'"***

⁴⁶ ***As long as he has sores, he will be unclean; since he is unclean, he must live in isolation; he must live outside the camp.***

So while there would have been some sort of building outside of the city gates to house them, they had to come to the city gate to beg for food. Notice that the term in the Torah Law is that they must stay "outside the camp". Outside the camp was a term used for when they were still wandering in the Wilderness and living in a tent camp. Now that they are settled in the Promised Land, the "camp" came to be seen as any city that had walls. Thus **metsorim** had to stay outside the city walls, even though there was no prohibition about where they could be inside wall-less rural towns and villages.

But as one can imagine, if the residents inside the walls were resorting to unthinkable sources for food, the unclean outside the city gates had little if any chance of receiving charity. So the 4 men made a risky but pragmatic decision; if they remained sitting at the city gates waiting for food that didn't exist they would starve, and if they threw themselves on the mercy of the Arameans they might die, but on the other hand they might survive. So they took a chance and walked towards the Syrian encampment.

They got up before the sun rose to the horizon and in the dim light of early morning arrived at the perimeter of the Syrian tents expecting to be stopped by a scout or sentry. But nothing happened. In fact, there was not a soldier in sight. Verses 5 and 6 explain that God caused the Syrian army to imagine that they had heard the sounds of horses and chariots, of an enormous army coming to rescue Samaria. They became terrified and ran for their lives. It would seem that if one had a horse or a chariot one would take the time to ready it and use it to escape, but when panic sets in often the instinct to flee becomes overpowering and that is what happened here.

The Aramean army left so quickly that they took nothing more than whatever clothing they were wearing at the time. Prepared and unprepared food was left behind. The Aramean soldiers figured that Jehoram had hired the armies of the kings of the Hittites and of the Egyptians to come and rescue Israel. And now they were surrounded and vulnerable. There is no evidence that this had actually occurred, but such a thing was quite common. Kings often rented out their armies for a treasure trove of gold and silver because it allowed them to accumulate more wealth at little risk to themselves. The welfare of their soldiers was secondary at best.

Let's be clear that verse 6 unequivocally states that the Lord had done this. This was not the cause of some unusual but natural night sounds that the soldiers mistook for horses and chariots. We have seen on numerous occasions in the Bible that the Lord will fill an enemy with an irrational fear that causes them to wilt or to run away. But notice something else: the Lord had intentionally deceived the Syrians.

Last week we discussed that Elisha had lied to and deceived some other Syrian soldiers who had come to arrest him. He asked the Lord to blind them, meaning to dull their perception. Then Elisha told them that he was not the man they had come for (even though he was) but knew where they could find him. Then he marched them to Samaria and upon arrival asked the Lord to restore their lost perception. I said that it bothers some Christians that a great Bible hero and agent for God would lie to an enemy, or that the same might intentionally deceive an enemy. But here we see even the Lord do it. And that is because there is no Biblical commandment against lying to and/or deceiving one's enemy in battle. The New Testament instruction to love your enemies doesn't extend to simply giving away military secrets, divulging battle plans, and truthfully answering anything your enemy wants to know so that they can have victory.

The 4 *metsorim* simply could not resist the unguarded bounty they stumbled upon. Was this stealing? Heavens no. This was spoils of war. However, did the spoils of war belong entirely to them? The answer is also no. So they began to feel guilty about their find, and no doubt figured out that when their king discovered that they had delayed in informing him that they would have paid with their lives. So they talked it over and went back to the city gates and called out to the gatekeepers. The word started spreading around the city and soon reached the king's ears.

Naturally he did not believe that the Aramean army had fled since there would be no reason for them to do that. But why would these 4 men lie about it? Jehoram's heart was just too hard to even remember the Word of God he had received only hours earlier from Elisha. It is now apparent that his wearing of sackcloth was about as deep as his repentance went; he remained a thoroughly wicked and unchanged man.

But one of his royal court insisted that the king at least check out the situation; at this point any hope was better than none. Jehoram seemed more concerned that he might lose some of his still alive and thus valuable horses to the enemy if this turned out to be a ruse and an ambush. But his servants convinced him that it didn't matter because if the horses were captured, the remaining ones would die of starvation any time now, or be slaughtered for food.

The horsemen went out and saw the empty camp. There were footprints and strewn clothing leading all the way to the Jordan River. One can only imagine the thoughts that went through these Hebrew scouts' minds. Why would Aram just leave so suddenly and abandon everything after spending all this months in siege? Are they just over the horizon ready to attack? But the scouts reported back to the king what they saw.

The anxiousness of the people of Samaria to get to some food in the Syrian camp must have been overwhelming. The pushing and shoving gave way to a stampede as the gates were opened for them to stream out for the first time in months. And the same servant who had scoffed at Elisha's oracle from God found himself trampled to death by the starving residents of Samaria as they rushed out to loot and forage for food. And indeed there was so much food left by the vast Syrian army that food prices drastically dropped with the abundant supply.

The last 3 verses of chapter 7 recount word-for-word Elisha's prophecy that there would be plentiful food in only 1 day, and that the unbelieving servant would see it appear but never get to partake of it. It is ironic that the stampede that killed him was caused by the unexpected presence of the very thing that he denied was even possible.

We'll begin chapter 8 next time.