

Kings and Prophets 14-04-25a

This is Friday, the 25th of April, 2014. We're in 2 Kings, resuming in chapter 6. We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to go before the throne of grace and recognize the provision that God has made for us to learn from His Word and to benefit from fellowship with one another. And having done that, we'll pick up in the vicinity of verse 8 of 2 Kings, chapter 6. Shall we pray? Father, we come before You with gratitude in our hearts and appreciation for the Lord Jesus and the wonderful gifts that He has given to us, the salvation that He has provided for us, the way into Your very throne room that He has made available to us.

We thank You for Him. We thank You for Your compassion on us, Your provision for us in so many ways that brings us to this point tonight where we can spend time together in encouragement and in appreciation for all of these things. We thank You for this portion of Your Word that is before us.

We thank You for the freedom to study it together without any threat of persecution or harassment. We know that this is not true in many parts of the world. We pray for those who labor in far fields, whether in Indonesia or in Africa.

We ask Your special blessing on them and on us as we spend this time together that Your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that we will have as a result of this time fresh insight and fresh motivation and encouragement, power in our souls to accomplish Your good purpose. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

In 2 Kings chapters 5 and 6, we have a collection of episodes that took place during the ministry of the prophet Elisha. It is relatively evident that these are not arranged chronologically, but rather thematically. And they are not designed to give us a sequential narrative, but are episodes.

They are recollections of things that took place during the time of King Joram or Jehoram in northern Israel. You remember that king's paternity and maternity. Who are King Joram's parents? Ahab and Jezebel.

He has a sister who is the queen down in Judah at the Liah. And this is bad news for everyone concerned. This is what they call the Omride dynasty that began with Omri, from whom Ahab derived.

Jezebel, of course, is a Gentile pagan gal from up north and west. And this doesn't bode well. So in chapter 6, we have already seen the floating axe head, which is tremendously significant.

We looked at these things that are thrown into the liquid to produce various results. We looked at the contents of the Ark of the Covenant in this regard. And the reminders that God places before His people of that covenant.

It is the Ark of the Covenant. This is the covenant, singular, between God and His people. And it is so important to understand that covenant relationship.

I was actually sent a link, or maybe I was sent the article itself, by a pastor who I have had contact with in the past. And it was an article having to do with God's dealing with nations and believers within a nation and so on. And I was reminded, as I read that article, of the care that must be taken in looking at God's relationship to Israel.

And the national promises, the national identity that is involved there. And the, as Tommy Smothers would say, the analogous relationship in terms of application. When you observe, interpret, and apply, this is God dealing with His people.

His people are in a nation. And in my humble opinion, and this is my opinion, you can take it for whatever you think it's worth. I think sometimes there is a slight bad landing.

Have you ever seen the Olympic gals, you know, they're running down the thing and they do the, whatever it is, the little springboard deal. And they hit the pommel horse and they flip around. It's all about the landing.

The gals on the uneven bars, it's all about the, you know, did they stick the landing? They have to come down and land and not overbalance, not bounce, not underbalance, not bend their knees, not fall over. You know, the whole idea is all the other stuff you do, but it all ends with the landing. How did you stick the landing? Well, this is my mental picture of observe, interpret, apply.

We observe, we interpret, but you really want to stick the landing, the application. You want to land squarely balanced on your feet, you know, having absorbed the whole thing, having done it all well, and you're poised and ready to execute. And I think, I see it as kind of a flubbed landing when people who do a great job in observation and interpretation come around to application, specifically in looking at God's dealing with Israel, and they say, notice the blessings and cursings and so on.

And the interpretation is, you know, God really wants people to do this, that, and the other. And they'll make political observations. They'll say, look around at politics today.

Look around at culture and society today, and they'll say, you know, we need to take the country back for God. And you just, you didn't get both your feet down, in my opinion, because, in my view, my understanding, yes, God dealt with the nation. Yes, there are national issues and national promises and so on.

But when you come to application today, think of it, God dealing with His people. The nation is my soul, not this nation. We are not Israel.

God does not have a national covenant with the United States of America, just as He didn't have a national covenant with England or any other nation from the time that Israel ceased to be

God's people. And God's nation. The application is to God's people, God's persons.

We are a people in the sense that we are a body of Christ, and we are persons. And in that sense, our soul is the land. We drive the Canaanites out of our soul, not out of the United States.

We don't have the right, we don't have the provenance to claim national promises for our nation, because we're not the nation of Israel. We're not the new Israel. To the extent that our nation is populated with God-fearing believers, the nation is going to prosper.

But there is no national dealing that I see in Scripture. It is individual believers. So, just as a grain of salt sort of thing, and this is just me, just my belief.

As we look at God's dealings with the nation, the northern kingdom, there is a confused king on the throne. There is a prophet of God presenting both visually, via miraculous interventions of God, via prophetic utterance, the word of God. And there is a response or lack thereof in the nation, which by interpretation and application is we, us.

Loosely, as body of Christ, but primarily as individuals, it is up to us to learn from these examples and profit thereby. All these things were written for our instruction upon whom the ages have come. Upon whom? Upon us as individuals.

So, as we look at this, my encouragement to you is consider at least the understanding that as goes the nation in the Old Testament, so goes the believer in the New Testament age. These things are for our individual instruction and edification. And as we then together speak the truth in love and function as a new kind of organism, not as God's nation, but as body of Christ, we benefit by the corporate application of these things.

But we don't claim Old Testament promises. This is where covenant theology goes astray and creates all kinds of confusion. Having said that, we're in chapter 6 and we saw this picture, the third picture now of Elisha.

He throws salt into the water at Jericho. He throws flour into the poisoned pot of stew. Now he throws a stick into the water.

I was listening. A lot of you have that Word of Promise Bible. I was playing.

I looped 2 Kings 6. And when he throws the stick, you hear the splash. It's great. I love that.

Sound effects. You hear the stick hitting the water. And I think, that's right.

That's how it happened. He didn't fish around with it and lift the axe head out. And lucky guess, where did it go in? Oh, well, you should have used a stick.

It's miraculous. And he throws the stick in. And we've talked about the significance.

That was the first seven verses. Pick it up for yourself. And this is what we are to do.

These truths, we pick it up for ourselves. It's up to us. What we do with the truth of God, what we do with the promises of God, what we do with the provision of God, it's up to us.

We've got to pick it up for ourselves. There's only so much the man of God will do. Now this is going to become extremely evident, this truth, this perspective, I think, becomes even more evident in this next section.

Let's read it and refresh ourselves on the details. Beginning in 2 Kings 6, verse 8. Now, the king of Syria was making war against Israel. Well, now I've got to stop.

The king of Syria. Let's just refresh our minds on what's going on with Syria. Syria is the Aramaean bunch.

That's a huge slice going, they exist to the north and somewhat to the east. What's the capital of Syria? Damascus. Significant city, Old Testament and new.

But Damascus is actually the head of a city-state area called Zobah. Zobah is the province and Damascus is the capital. So back as far as, and I had to take notes on this, my memory is not what it was, so forgive me, I've got to read a little bit of this.

But you have Tiglath-Pileser I, around 1100, the year 1100. This is in, say, the days of Samuel, the late judges and early Samuel period. Tiglath-Pileser, they've got some inscriptions, Aramaean inscriptions from around this time, from around the 10th century.

Their language is derived from the same roots as Hebrew. It's a northwest Semitic dialect. And, of course, Aramaic is going to become the language of Israel during the captivity.

And it's easy for them to learn, but it begins to divorce them from the language of their fathers, from the language of the law, so much so that when they come back to the land and try to read the law, somebody has to interpret. There's that distance between Aramaic and Hebrew. I've told you before, in my estimation, it's roughly the distance between Spanish and Italian.

Very similar. You can get by. There's so many cognates, but you really need somebody to explain the harder syntax and different vocabulary, but many similarities.

But Aramaic, because these guys are so heavy into trade, they're at the crossroads of trade routes and things, and this is going to be the language of trade. And this is one of the reasons English has spread around the world, is because it's been the language of commerce. And both the United Kingdom and later on the United States are so heavy into trade and have exported and have gotten control of so many things.

English has spread largely because of trade. The same thing was true with Aramaic. And from Babylon to Egypt, this language just spread.

This would later be the case with Greek. And they're in the Roman Empire because of its sway and spread. Greek is going to spread all over the known world.

But Zobah was a region all the way from the Euphrates River, it's huge, all the way down to the borders of Israel. And Damascus was the capital. And so David, you may remember, in 2 Samuel 8, defeats Hadadezer, the king of Zobah.

Well, that's the prototypical Syrian or Aramaic province. And he so dominated in his day that he put garrisons in Damascus. David did.

You find this out in... Saul was the first one. In 1 Samuel 14, 47, Saul waged war against Zobah as well. So I say all of that to say this.

When we get into this chapter and we see this incursion by the Syrians down into Israel, this is an old fight. This is an old enemy. This stuff has been going on at least since the days of Saul and David.

And Israel would push north. The Syrians would push south. Israel would push north.

The Aramaic Syrians would push south. And there's this constant... It kind of reminds you of what they had with the Philistines on the west. Saul fights the Philistines.

The Philistines come back. David fights the Philistines. The Philistines come back.

David fights them again and again and again. And finally, David pretty well wipes out the Philistines in the latter days. And the last of the giants are slain.

But they constantly had this problem in the west. And they had the Syrian airman problem on the north. Remember when we did our studies about Pekah and Rezin way down later on? Well, you still got the Syrians up there.

And for Judah, this becomes a problem. So that's who we're talking about. Solomon, in 2 Chronicles 8, took Hamath-Zobah.

And this is another... We say, Oh, Solomon, there was peace in the days of Solomon. Well, he took Hamath-Zobah. There was still... The one place where they still had a wrinkle in the peace was up there in the Syrian area.

Ben-Hadad fought with Ahab. We saw this in 1 Kings 20. And he's eventually going to get murdered as we go forward here in another chapter or two in 2 Kings.

Ben-Hadad is going to be killed by one of his own. But that's where we are. This is just this historic back and forth.

Thorn in the side of Israel. Why? Why is it even there? Because they did not obey God's command to utterly destroy the nations. And God does not bless them with victory, permanent

victory, because they're not being faithful.

And for the same reasons that the Philistines harassed them, for the same reasons that they had trouble with Moab and Ammon, and in some cases, Edom on the east, and Egypt from the south. These are the bordering nations. And they're constantly transgressing the borders, constantly disturbing the peace, because they have not been eradicated.

Principle of application. Nation in the Old Testament. Believer in the New.

So long as we allow the existence of the nations, and we do not cleanse and purge the landscape, and drive these things out by means of the power of God and the presence of God. You know, the presence of God drives dark and doubt and fear away. Remember the words of the old hymn.

That's what we need. The more we cultivate the active presence of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, in our souls, Jesus describes it in detail in the Upper Room Discourse, John 14, 15, 16. The more we do that, the more we open the door and the Lord Jesus comes in, and is our active company.

This is the presence of God in the land, and it drives these forces into the darkness which is outside. To the extent that there is a lack of the presence of God, a lack of honoring God, obeying God, reverencing God, your borders start getting trampled. The wall of fire grows dim.

The hedge around the vineyard is broken down. And all of these images are Old Testament examples of what happens to the soul of the believer in this age. Then we wonder, why is there no peace? There is no peace, saith my God, to those who have wickedness in the camp.

Sin in the camp. So that's kind of what's going on here. Now, that is Syria.

Just as a reminder, when it says the King of Syria comes in, this is the same King of Syria Naaman serves. Now, this episode is almost certainly earlier than Naaman. And again, we just have this loose collection of episodes that are brought together in this order for a reason, and we're going to see why.

So the King of Syria was making war against Israel. Why? God had promised them peace on every side. Land flowing with milk and honey.

But why is there war? Because they're disobedient. This isn't a test to see if they're going to continue their faith under pressure. This is discipline and national judgment, because they are rampantly disobedient.

They've got an evil king, and they follow him, and they like him. So he's making war against Israel, and he consulted with his servants, saying, Notice will be in italics. My camp, such and such a place.

So what he's planning to do is establish a forward position from which he will make a surprise

attack into Israel. This guy is kind of prosecuting war on several different fronts. He doesn't want to commit his entire army down in Samaria, down in northern Israel.

He wants to kind of do a snatch and grab, just use a portion of his forces. He wants to achieve his objective using a smaller force by surprise. So he says, This is what I'm going to do.

I don't want to be fighting on three or four fronts at once. So I'm going to put my camp down here, and I'm going to mass my forces. Then I'll make a big raid, and I'll capture them unawares.

It's a surprise attack. So the man of God, this is Elisha, sent to the king of Israel, this is Joram, the evil king, presiding over a disobedient kingdom. So how gracious is this? It's not time.

This is a time of opportunity. God is using discipline. God is using various forms of negative encouragement, shall we say, to try to get his people to turn.

All day long, I hold out my hands to this disobedient and stiff-necked people. This is God holding out his hands. It's not time for them to be overrun.

It's not time for them to be captured and destroyed. So even in the midst of their disobedience, God is preserving, and God is providing, and God is protecting. So God sends word to evil king Joram through Elisha the prophet, saying, King Assyria is planning a surprise attack, and this is where he's massing his forces.

The attack will not work if the element of surprise is lost. This is how I know it's a small force. This is how I know he's planning surprise, because once his position is discovered, there's lookouts gazing down into the valley where he was hoping to hide.

He doesn't do it, and he's very frustrated. So he picks a different valley and a different route of attack, and Joram gets warned again by Elisha, and they see the lookouts, and they say, lost the element of surprise, can't do it. And this happens more than once or twice.

The man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, Beware that you do not pass this place. When it says do not pass this place, it means don't ignore this place. Don't let this go unscrutinized, unwatched.

Post-centuries, don't ignore it. Don't be unaware of it. Pass isn't really a, it's like, don't march by here, or they'll hit you and defile or something.

That's not what he's talking about. He says, don't ignore this place. This place is important.

Keep a watch on it. And sure enough, they start seeing Syrian advance parties trickling in, and the Syrian advance parties see the centuries and say, Oh, they've spied us out. So the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God told him.

Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice. This happened several

times. They kept trying all the likely surprise attack places to no avail.

Therefore, the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing. Why is it they can't be that good? These guys are just not that good. Why are they, I must have an intelligence leak.

There's a spy. Something's going on. They're being told, because we pick a fresh spot, and we're immediately seen.

So he calls his servants, the king of Syria does. He says to them, will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? There's a rotten apple in the barrel here. Somebody's sprung a leak.

One of his servants said, none, my lord, O king. Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel, the words that you speak in your bedroom. He's got supernatural knowledge of your most private thoughts and conversations.

So the king says, go see where he is, that I may send and get him. Now, the king of Syria here is not the sharpest knife in the drawer. If Elisha knows ahead of time all of the locations of his surprise attack camps, do you think he's not going to know when you send an army to go get him? He caught me completely by surprise.

I'm good when you're attacking the king, but I'm helpless when you're coming after me. What's he thinking? This is just not smart. But the guy is just, well, if Elisha is the problem, I'll go get Elisha.

Well, good luck with that. So, therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. This is Dothan.

And we know that this is where Elisha is located more often than not. When he's not on an itinerant ministry, he's at Dothan. Dothan's 12 miles north-ish of Samaria.

Twelve miles. Not too far. A couple of hours' march by a fast army.

So they just go right in, and they send a contingent. Now, again, this is not the entire army, but it's enough to surround the village of Dothan. Not near enough to attack Samaria, or they would just go on down there.

So, the horses and chariots and a great army is sent there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And this is a sizable army. It's not an enormous army.

So, when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. I'm pretty sure this is Gehazi. Notice, by the way, what I meant to say earlier on is, because this is sort of a loose collection of stories, these stories circulated probably in an oral form and were collected by the editor of Kings.

This book is manifestly a collected history, and not by just one guy. There's not an author of the book of Kings. These are like the book of Chronicles.

They were the annals. This was the summary of a year's history or whatever. So, different people would bring these stories in.

And notice, it says, the man of God in verse 9. And it doesn't say Elisha. And these details were sort of added later by the editor. But this is in all probability Gehazi.

Remember what Gehazi's name means? What does Gehazi mean? Oh, the one who sees. The one who sees. You know it's coming up in this story, right? Because the servant of God goes out early, went out, and there's an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots.

And his servant, who I think is Gehazi, says to him, Elisha, 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. 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 mountains full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

All around Elisha. Interesting choice of words, isn't it? It doesn't say all around Dothan. It doesn't say all around them.

It says all around Elisha. And this kind of reminds me of Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. They look up, they see two guys talking with Jesus, and somehow they know that this is Moses and Elijah.

How do they know? Do Jesus say, Peter, Elijah, Elijah, Peter, Elijah, John, John, Elijah? Does he do introductions all around, or do they just sort of know? Here the servant realizes that all of these armies of fire and chariots of fire and horses of fire are surrounding specifically Elisha. Elisha is protected by this heavenly vanguard. And Elisha, praise the Lord, opened his eyes, and so now he is the one who sees.

And this is sort of his nickname. Well, he's the guy who saw. He's the guy that God opened his eyes so he could see.

And I think this becomes his name. He may have been named something completely different when he was born by his parents. But I think he's Gehazi from now on.

Why would you have Gehazi, the one who sees? And here's a guy that has his eyes open so he can see, but they're not the same guy. Maybe any servant of Elisha is the guy who sees because he's near the man of God, and that's what he's supposed to do. In any case, he sees this.

Now, it's time for us to pause and take our break. But notice here one thing, something to chew on besides the snacks over the break. Elisha sees the Syrians coming down to him, and so he prays to the Lord in verse 18, and he says, O Lord, mobilize the fiery chariots, horses, and soldiers.

Have them come down and slay these annoying Syrians for me, please. Right? He says, Strike

them with blindness. So God, capital H-E, struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

God blinds them according to the word of Elisha. Elisha doesn't blind them according to the word of the Lord. The fiery chariots and horsemen don't come down and slay them, confuse them, turn them back, drive them off, scare them into flight.

They're blinded. What an interesting choice. Why does Elisha, knowing that there's an army of the Lord there ready to slaughter these guys, why does he say, O God, blind them? And this, by the way, is not total blindness.

They're not feeling about. They are blind in a very specific way, and this kind of reminds you of Genesis 19. The guys that were trying to get into Lot's house were apparently not totally blind.

They were blind to where the door was. They couldn't find the door. They didn't all run around saying, I'm blind, I'm blind, help me, help me, and they'd get all distracted and scattered because they didn't know where they were anymore.

They're disoriented and freshly blind and wander off. They keep searching for the door, and they just can't see it. There is a specific thing they cannot see.

Here, this army of the Syrians, they can see their stuff, they can see each other, they can see Elisha. What they can't see is where they are. And they apparently can't identify Elisha for who he is because their whole mission is to grab him.

But it is as though his identity is withheld from them much as the identity of the Lord Jesus was withheld from the two men on the road to Emmaus who knew him well. But his identity was withheld. They were blind to who he was.

This is a very fascinating thing. With God, it's not just an all or nothing, now you see, now you don't. It's some things you will see, some things you will not.

You have a selective, a very particular, a very custom-made blindness. Remember when it says blindness has happened in part to Israel? And they say, well, part of Israel has been blinded and the rest of Israel has not been blinded. There is a selective blindness, I think, of this same type that has happened to Israel.

They love God, they appreciate the promises that you have the Pharisees. Do they not believe in God? Do they not believe that God is going to send a Redeemer? Do they not understand some of the rudiments of the Levitical symbolism? They understand those things. They've been trained in it from their youth and they believe it.

They have a zeal for God, Paul says. But not according to knowledge. There has been a selective blindness that happened to Israel.

And the scales will not fall from their eyes until they say, blessed is he who comes in the name

of the Lord. And then that selective, that blindness in part that has happened to Israel will be removed. Those who come to faith, those who came to faith in the first century, that blindness was removed.

In any case, and of course Paul is symbolic of that. You remember Damascus Road, that whole idea of his blindness, he is emblematic of religious Israel. And when the scales fall from their eyes, that's when they will see Christ for who he is.

Well, it's an interesting notion. But my suggestion is, as we pause here and take our break, why is it that with all of the available firepower, this very passive defense is implemented? No harm comes to a single soldier, not so much as a shoe buckle is broken in the entire great Aramean army that comes down to take Elisha. They are just prevented from doing what they came to do.

It's the minimum application of force. Nobody is hurt. And yet, what has Gehazi just seen? There is the potential for imminent and total annihilation of every living thing that Ben-Hadad sent down here.

It's available to Elisha. He sees it, his servant sees it, but what does Elisha pray for? Not the maximum available application of force, the minimum necessary to thwart the purpose. This is a powerful example for us.

And we'll talk about it more when we come back from the break.