

## 2 Kings 8:1-29

### An Additional Story About Elisha

This story is confusing, because it's out of place chronologically. The author or editor of 2 Kings believed the famine warned about here refers to the siege of Samaria in the previous chapter, so this story is placed here in the narrative. But most scholars place it after the raising of the Shunammite's son (**2 Kings 8:1**), and before the healing of Naaman the Syrian (**2 Kings 8:5**), since there is no evidence here of Gehazi's leprosy.

The famine would be the one mentioned in **2 Kings 4:38** concerning the poisonous pot of stew - "When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. As the company of prophets was sitting before him, he said to his servant, 'Put the large pot on, and make some stew for the company of prophets.'"

**2 Kings 8:1-2** - "Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years."

"Then" is not in the Hebrew text. This is looking back on a previous incident, so it should be, "Elisha had spoken unto the woman..."

Famine was one of four expressions of God's judgment on Israel.

- **Ezekiel 14:21** - "For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?"

This is represented in the Book of Revelation:

- **Revelation 6:8** - "...And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."

The rabbis criticize leaders like Abraham and Jacob for seeking relief from famine in Egypt, as well as Elimelech, who left the Promised Land for Moab to get relief from a famine so he wouldn't have to help the poor. But individuals are allowed, they explain. It's unusual for a prophet to tell someone to leave. But Israel was now saturated with idolatry and the famine was coming as judgment. The widow was a believer, and Elisha wanted to spare her suffering.

But by leaving during the famine, she had lost control of her ancestral land, and perhaps because her relatives had taken it over and wouldn't give it back. Rashi says "robbers occupied it."

**2 Kings 8:3** - "And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned

out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land."

At this point, Gehazi was still the trusted disciple of Elisha, before he tried to fool Elisha concerning the secret payment for Naaman's healing; before he was cursed with leprosy.

This scene takes place during a time when King Jehoram was on good terms with Elisha, apparently.

**2 Kings 8:4-5** - "And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life."

Some early commentators see King Jehoram restoring the widow as a kind of resurrection, a reflection of what Elisha had done for her son. Her coming out from among the Philistines is like Israel coming out of Egypt or later out of exile in Babylon, or the church being called out from the world.

**2 Kings 8:6** - "And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now."

### **The Treachery of Hazael**

After Elisha told the Syrian general Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River and be healed his leprosy, Elisha became renown outside of Israel, and apparently was even welcomed in the court of the Syrian king - at least during periodic times of peace between Syria and Israel.

And we're chronologically back to the "present" time, after the Syrian siege in chapter 7.

**2 Kings 8:7** - "And Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither."

Why did Elisha go to Syria? It doesn't say. Perhaps this meeting occurred after Elisha showed mercy to the Syrian raiders who tried to kidnap him. Maybe he wanted to follow up with Naaman to teach him more about the true God who had healed him.

The name Ben-Hadad means "son of Hadad, god of storm and thunder." It was more like a title, like Pharaoh or the Philistine Abimelech. There were several Ben-Hadads mentioned.

Syria is also called Aram in the Bible. Arameans were Syrians.

**2 Kings 8:8** - "And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

This request would come with a substantial gift or payment, which Elisha probably refused as before.

**2 Kings 8:9** - "So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

### A Grim Vision

**2 Kings 8:10** - "And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, 'Thou mayest certainly recover:' howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die."

Were these statements contradictory? Not as it turned out. The disease didn't kill him.

**2 Kings 8:11** - "And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept."

Elisha stared at Hazael and looked into his soul. God showed Elisha how this man would bring calamity on the land of Israel. Elisha tried to keep himself from weeping in front of Hazael at what he saw, but he eventually broke into tears.

**2 Kings 8:12** - "And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child."

We'll see in coming chapters that Elisha appoints Jehu to revenge the house of Ahab and get rid of Baal worship, but he will retain the worship of the golden calves. So God will use Hazael to inflict terrible judgment on Israel (**2 Kings 10:32**).

Despite the idolatry that permeated the northern kingdom of Israel, Elisha still mourned for what God's judgment would do to the people.

Remember that God "removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (**Daniel 2:21**). We don't always understand why, but God's will is not restrained.

**2 Kings 8:13** - "And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."

On the surface, it appears that Hazael did not think he was capable of such destruction. At this point Hazael was merely a court advisor to King Ben-hadad. And only a dog would do such terrible things. We, also, are ignorant of our own evil hearts and the wickedness we are capable of. We all consider ourselves to be "good." But...

- **Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Although God foreknew his actions, Hazael was still free to choose good over evil and repent. He chose evil. (Jonah's prophecy against Nineveh is an example of this: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" But Nineveh repented, so God spared the city, much to Jonah's dismay).

### Assassination

**2 Kings 8:14-15** - "So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead."

Basically Hazael "water-boarded" Ben-Hadad, suffocating him in his bed, and at the same time it would leave to marks of violence, looking like a natural death.

This incident is recorded in other ancient writings. An Assyrian inscription called the Berlin inscription says, "Hazael the son of nobody, seized the throne." i.e. it emphasized he was not in the dynastic line of the deposed king Ben-Hadad.

### Flashback

This whole interchange with Hazael was a fulfillment of God's command to Elijah after his appearance in the "still small voice" at Mount Horeb:

- **1 Kings 19:15-16** - "Then the LORD said to him, "Go back by the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you arrive, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. You are also to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah to succeed you as prophet..."

Elisha, as Elijah's successor, was fulfilling this command now. It's not clear why Elijah didn't do this himself. But he was "taken up" before he could accomplish it.

Later, the descendants of Hazael will receive their own judgment from God:

- **Amos 1:4** - "But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad."

## Update on the Kingship in both Israel and Judah

Meanwhile in Judah, Jehoram succeeded his father Jehoshaphat, who had reigned for 25 years. Jerhoram reigned for eight years. (Confusing, because he has the same name as the Jehoram king of the northern kingdom of Israel! )

**2 Kings 8:18** - "And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the LORD."

His wife we learn later was named Athaliah. There had been a marriage meant to heal the rift between the two nations. But it had only succeeded in bringing israel's idolatry into Judah.

His crimes are recorded in 2 Chronicles:

- **2 Chronicles 21:11** - "Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto."

To consolidate his throne, he murdered his many brothers and many other leaders (**1 Chronicles 21:1-6**). Josephus expands on this, indicating that he committed the murders at the prompting of his wife Athaliah.

## A Mixing of Identities

The situation of both the king of Israel and the king of Judah having the same name - Jehoram - is suggestive of a mixing of identities; a blurring of distinctions.

Both kingdoms now harbor the same idolatry first devised by Jeroboam - the golden calves. In spiritual terms the two identities are blended. The old man has corrupted the spiritual man.

When uncleanness is touched someone who is clean, the uncleanness is passed on. The idolatry of Israel now infected the southern kingdom of Judah. Now they were indistinguishable in God's eyes.

But God refrained from immediate judgment on Judah.

**2 Kings 8:19** - "Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give him alway a light, and to his children."

"a light" here meant a kingdom, according to the rabbis.

That promise is seen in **Psalms 132:11-12, 17** - "The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children

shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. ...I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed."

The promise was repeated to Jeroboam when God informs him that he will take 10 tribes away from Solomon:

- **1 Kings 11:36** - "And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there."

This is reflection of our situation - It's because of the Son of David, Jesus, that God doesn't wipe us all out. Instead, He looks at believers and sees only His Son.

Because of his idolatry, Jehoram lost control of the vassal state of Edom. Although he defeated them in a battle, he had to turn back to put down a rebellion in his own kingdom before he could consolidate his victory.

Libnah was a Levitical city of Judah, which may have revolted to protest the idolatry introduced by Jehoram and Ahaziah.

According to **2 Chronicles 21:12-15**, Elijah wrote Jehoram a letter, condemning him for his sins and predicting that judgment would come upon him and disaster upon the nation. Perhaps his was a prophecy he received before he was taken up. to be given to the future king later?

- **2 Chronicles 21:12-15** - "And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day.

And indeed, Jehoram died in a gruesome way:

- **2 Chronicles 21:19** - "And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers."

"burning" = a memorial bonfire to honor him

Jehoram was succeeded by his son Ahaziah as king of Judah.

**2 Kings 8:26-27** - "Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter of

Omri king of Israel. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab."

Walking in the "way of Ahab" was worse than just walking in the "way of the kings of Israel," which itself was pretty bad.

### **Battle Against Hazael**

The two kingdoms of Judah and Israel agree to a pact to join to fight against Hazael, the new ruler of the Syrians. Elisha had foreseen terrible things that he would inflict on the people of Israel.

(Jehoram, king of Israel, is called "Joram" here to distinguish him from Jehoram king of Judah.)

**2 Kings 8:28-29** - "And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick."

Meanwhile, God has shown Elisha a way to bring about the complete end of all the house of Ahab and Jezebel, which he has prophesied previously. Joram and Ahaziah were now in the same place - both eggs in one basket, so to speak.

And when God makes an omelette, He's gotta break some eggs.

**Bottom Line:** God's word - in this case his judgment - is inevitable and relentless. Events in history that seem to follow the random whims and will of kings are actually following the plan of God to display both His wrath and His mercy. What seems like chaos is shown to be the plan of God.

**Next week:** The rise of Jehu and the death of Jezebel.