

2 Kings 8 • Learning the Right Lesson

Introduction

This chapter refers to a number of personalities who have been previously encountered in God's Word. Character studies, where we follow the rise or decline in particular lives, especially as such parallel their spiritual condition, can be a way for God's Word to speak to us regarding our own spiritual character and faith. Since we not only have those before us in our own life whose successes and failures can inform us, we likewise have God's Word which has already addressed every situation and issue we will ever face, both physically and spiritually. And of course we have our own personal victories and defeats. The question for us is whether we have learned the right lesson not just from ourselves or others, but from God's Word as well.

¹Now Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, "Arise and go with your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will even come on the land for seven years."

²So the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God, and she went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. ³At the end of seven years, the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went out to appeal to the king for her house and for her field.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: What is different about this famine in the time of Elisha, versus that in the time of his predecessor Elijah?

A: This one is twice as long—seven years, whereas the one during Elijah's ministry was 3-1/2 years. (Ja. 5:17)

Q: The text never states it as such, but what might we suspect is the cause of a famine which is twice as severe as the previous?

A: The signs God supplied through Elisha, having a double portion of Elijah's spirit, were even more powerful, and yet continued to be ignored by the general population. As we know from the repeated pattern documented in Scripture, those unchanged by the signs are equally unchanged by the greater, accompanying message. There is an increase in direct proportion to the lack of a response to His Word and ways.

Q: What are the two miracles which this woman previously experienced concerning her son?

A: In 2 Kings 4 is the account of first being miraculously enabled to bear a child, then the miracle of his being raised from the dead.

Q: What appears to have changed in this woman's life since we last saw her in 2 Kings 4?

A: The fact that the text keeps referring to "her household" seems to indicate that she no longer has a husband.

Q: Why might that be significant to this situation?

A: Because everything which belonged to the father would be inherited by the son, who would be needed in order to lay a proper claim to the land.

Point: This is a contrast to the situation in Ruth where Naomi's husband and sons died, and it therefore took a "kinsman-redeemer" to marry Ruth, her daughter-in-law, in order to be restored to the land.

Q: So why might it also be significant that the text specifies that she comes back to Israel at the end of seven years?

A: The Law specified that all debts were to be forgiven every seven years and the land returned to the original owner. (Dt. 15)

Q: What is different about the woman's reaction to Elisha this time around?

A: Previously, with both the birth and death of her son (2 Ki. 4:8-37), she was initially combative with Elisha; this time she is compliant and obedient.

Q: What might be a further indication that she acted by faith?

A: She not only left as told at the very beginning, but returned at the very end when she had been originally told that "it will come on the land for seven years". She trusted the Word of God through His prophet.

Application: The woman is an example of someone who has learned the right lessons from the **miracles** of God performed in her life; she has learned to respond to God's **Word** by **faith**.

⁴Now the king was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, "Please relate to me all the great things that Elisha has done."

⁵As he was relating to the king how he had restored to life the one who was dead, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and for her field. And Gehazi said, "My lord, O king, this is the woman and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life."

⁶When the king asked the woman, she related it to him. So the king appointed for her a certain officer, saying, "Restore all that was hers and all the produce of the field from the day that she left the land even until now."

[Read v.4-6]

Q: Why should we be shocked to find Gehazi first talking with the king, and then the woman and her son coming up to them?

A: The last time we saw Gehazi, he had been struck with leprosy for deceiving Naaman into giving him the payment in the name of his master Elisha. (2 Ki. 15:15-27) Anyone coming into contact with a leper would become ritually unclean. If Gehazi has not been healed of this condition, his having conversations with anyone would have to take place under very strict conditions.

Q: Although no one was prohibited from speaking to a leper, how would a meeting take place?

A: Since they were designated to remain outside the city proper, the king would have to go out to meet him.

Point: It is the king who is the seeker, desiring to know "all the great things that Elisha has done". He is a seeker of the truth.

Q: Why might the king go to all the trouble of getting this information from a leper?

A: Because Gehazi was a firsthand witness to these things.

Q: What is significant about what the king ordered to be restored to the woman?

A: It was not just the land, but what is legally called the "mesne profits"—that is, the full value of all that the land would have produced during the whole seven years.

Application: **Faith** resulted in a complete and full **inheritance** with no loss whatsoever.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴**to obtain an inheritance** which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are **protected by the power of God through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. — 1 Peter 1:3-5

[Read v.7-15]

⁷Then Elisha came to Damascus. Now Ben-hadad king of Aram was sick, and it was told him, saying, "The man of God has come here."

⁸The king said to Hazael, "Take a gift in your hand and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD by him, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?'"

⁹So Hazael went to meet him and took a gift in his hand, even every kind of good thing of Damascus, forty camels' loads; and he came and stood before him and said, "Your son Ben-hadad king of Aram has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?'"

¹⁰Then Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You will surely recover,' but the LORD has shown me that he will

Q: What do we know about "Ben-hadad king of Aram"? Why might it be surprising that this Gentile king is contacting a Hebrew prophet?

A: Having first played a prominent role in the civil war between Judah and Israel (1 Ki. 15), this is the ruler who subsequently formed a coalition of thirty-two kings whom he brought against the Northern Kingdom of Israel during Ahab's reign. (1 Ki. 20) Although defeated by Ahab, because of the promise to return the territory his father had taken from Israel, he is granted clemency for which a prophet of God condemns Ahab. (1 Ki. 20:35-43) He is then subsequently found besieging Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom (2 Ki. 6:24-7:16). This is someone who has never been friendly to Israel.

Q: Why, then, did he inquire of the Lord?

A: This is partially a trick question, as he really made the inquiry indirectly to Elisha, and then only because Elisha happened to be in Damascus.

certainly die.” ¹¹He fixed his gaze steadily on him until he was ashamed, and the man of God wept.

¹²Hazael said, “Why does my lord weep?”

Then he answered, “Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel: their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their little ones you will dash in pieces, and their women with child you will rip up.”

¹³Then Hazael said, “But what is your servant, who is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?”

And Elisha answered, “The LORD has shown me that you will be king over Aram.”

¹⁴So he departed from Elisha and returned to his master, who said to him, “What did Elisha say to you?”

And he answered, “He told me that you would surely recover.”

¹⁵On the following day, he took the cover and dipped it in water and spread it on his face, so that he died. And Hazael became king in his place.

¹⁶Now in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then the king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah became king. ¹⁷He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. ¹⁸He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord. ¹⁹However, the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David His servant, since He had promised him to give a lamp to him through his sons always.

Q: But why do we consider this as most likely being a serious inquiry?

A: It is difficult to believe that someone sending “*forty camels’ loads*” of “*every good thing of Damascus*” does not have sincere intentions.

Q: Why might this remind us of Naaman?

A: He also initially came bearing gifts for the man of God.

Point: *A cavalcade of forty camels with all their various treasures and accompanying handlers would be quite a sight! The king uses the things of this world in hopes of obtaining a spiritual result. This was the meaning Jesus gave for the Parable of the Unrighteous Steward (Lk. 16:1-15). [If there is time, the leader may want to lead a discussion of this whole parable.]*

⁹“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. — Luke 16:9

Q: Is this the first time we have heard of Hazael?

A: He was first mentioned in God’s instructions to Elijah, that he was to anoint Hazael king over Aram. (1 Ki. 19:15)

Observation: *Here we see how Elijah and Elisha are unique in carrying out a single ministry in that Elijah was given the instruction, but it was carried out by Elisha.*

Q: Why is God’s reply through Elisha accurate?

A: The king will not die from the disease, and would have fully recovered if he had not been smothered to death by Hazael.

Q: When Elisha says, “The Lord has shown me that you will be king”, is this a license for Hazael to murder Ben-hadad?

A: No, it is something which Hazael undertakes on his own. God disclosed to Elisha the outcome, but in no way was authorizing the manner in which it would happen.

Q: Why might Elisha’s tearful response go unfelt by Hazael?

A: If he has no problem murdering his own king, he will surely be even less concerned about the things he is said to perpetrate against Israel.

Application: *Hazael is someone who attempts to **manipulate** God’s Word according to his own **timing** and **ways**.*

[Read v.16-19]

Q: Who are now designated as the kings of Israel and Judah?

A: The sons of the Ahab and Jehoshaphat.

Q: What was the main problem in Ahab’s life?

A: He married the King of Sidon’s daughter, Jezebel, who introduced Baal worship into Israel.

Q: What was the result of the alliance between Ahab and Jehoshaphat?

A: Jehoshaphat became a target of the enemy in Ahab’s place (2 Chr. 18), and was reprimanded by God through Hanani for this alliance (1 Chr. 19:1-3).

Q: So what is the issue here with their sons?

A: They not only enter into a similar alliance, but now the new king of Judah, Jehoram, has taken a daughter of Ahab for his wife. Rather walk in the ways of his father Jehoshaphat, he “*walked in the way of the kings of Israel*”, those who permanently forsook God’s Word and ways. He not only repeats his father’s mistakes, but his father-in-law’s.

²⁰In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. ²¹Then Joram crossed over to Zair, and all his chariots with him. And he arose by night and struck the Edomites who had surrounded him and the captains of the chariots; but his army fled to their tents. ²²So Edom revolted against Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time.

²³The rest of the acts of Joram and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? ²⁴So Joram slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son became king in his place.

²⁵In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign. ²⁶Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. ²⁷He walked in the way of the house of Ahab and did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of Ahab had done, because he was a son-in-law of the house of Ahab.

²⁸Then he went with Joram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-gilead, and the Arameans wounded Joram. ²⁹So King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramah when he fought against Hazael king of Aram. Then Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel because he was sick.

Application: Jehoram is an example of someone incapable of learning the right **lesson** from someone else's **mistakes**, even though he has **witnessed** them firsthand.

[Read v.20-22]

Q: What might be telling us to who responded to this revolt?

A: The text says "Edom revolted from Judah", and although we were previously informed that Jehoram is the King of Judah and Joram the King of Israel, it is the King of Israel who is responding.

Q: What is the net result?

A: Judah loses control, and Israel gains nothing in the process.

Q: What might be strategically important about the subsequent revolt of Libnah?

A: Whereas Edom was an enemy to the east, Libnah was located next to Philistia to the west. Strategically speaking, two different borders are now threatened. It was something which had also been originally assigned to Judah, but lost in the process of the intervention by Israel.

Application: Jehoram and Joram are an example of those who fail to learn from past **mistakes**. On a smaller scale, they replay the **mistakes** of their **fathers** before them.

[Read v.23-29]

Q: Who, exactly, replaced King Joram as the king of Judah?

A: His son Ahaziah whose mother is Athaliah.

Q: What is telling about Athaliah's heritage?

A: She is not only descended from Ahab a king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but the granddaughter of Omri, another king of Israel.

Point: The Southern Kingdom of Judah is now fully infiltrated by the worst spiritual influences imaginable by inter-marrying. Now King Ahaziah as the King of Judah not only "walked in the way of the house of Ahab", but joined with a woman who is quite possibly the worst historical and spiritual influence of any woman in Israel's history.

Q: What is the significance of the failure of the joint foray against Aram?

A: Previous conflicts with Aram had been resolved in Israel's favor, but now they are on the losing end. The series of military defeats in this chapter combine to provide a parallel picture of their progressive spiritual defeats. Everything is on a downward spiral.

Q: What will eventually happen to these kings?

A: They will be assassinated by Jehu (2 Ki. 9:24; 27), a figure anointed by one of Elisha's "sons of the prophets" as the King of Israel at Elisha's direction.

Q: What is completely absent from their alliance which was present in their fathers'?

A: Ahab had at least made a show of attempting to make it look like he was inquiring of the Lord and sought God's blessing through the many false prophets, and Jehoshaphat was wise enough to see through them and yet seek God's counsel through the authentic Prophet Micaiah. Even Ben-hadad and Hazael, Gentiles, spoke with Elisha, a prophet of God. Their sons never inquire of the Lord directly nor through one of His prophets.

Application: The final example is one of the complete **abandonment** of seeking God's **Word**.