

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

The events we have just read in I Kings 6:8-23 remind us of the days of the Old Testament judges. We take for instance the days of Gideon when the Midianites were raiding the Israelites farms so that they had to hide their grain in order to survive (Judges 6-7). Finally he cried out to God and God provided Gideon. But there is one important difference: now in these days of the Kings of the Omri dynasty of Israel the people do not cry out to God. The hearts of these kings are obstinate 顽固的 and rebellious 叛逆的 and we will see that this rebellion is further hardened as we open up the story we have today before us.

It has been written that these stories of chapters 5-8 of II Kings seems to have no historic progression to them nor do they really seem to fit together all that well. Naaman is healed and an axe head floats and Elisha leads the soldiers of Syria into Samaria by means of commanded blindness. "Generally," writes Philip E. Satterthwaite, "people understand the stories well enough but there seems no reason or pattern, or even importance to some of the events." However, suggests Satterthwaite, there does seem to be a nice revelational flow to the sections we have just read. In the beginning chapters of II Kings we see how God is taking care of the faithful even so that the sons of the prophets were beginning to grow as a group and that salvation belongs to the Lord who ensured that the son of the prophets would not lose everything in order to replace the sunken axe-head. The line of Omri and Ahab is slowly crumbling 瓦解 and the idol gods are exposed for who they are. Ian Hamilton points out that these chapters tell us about the LORD God and the truth of Naaman's statement, "I know that there is no other God than the Lord God of Israel." So the question now before is, "Will Israel as a nation under the leadership of Joram finally repent and call on the name of the Lord?"

One more time the LORD comes in mercy and grace. Israel does not deserve the victory we read about in II Kings 6:8-23. But there is something more, something that whets 刺激, 促进 our appetite for the world wide rule of the Son of David for now the Arameans will come to know the power of the Lord so that the general of the army and through him the king came to know the healing power of God and His mercy. Now these soldiers will be spared and shamed by the mercy of God. Finally then we come to understand by this Old Testament story what Paul would write to the Ephesians, namely,

Eph 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Eph 6:11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Eph 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

When Elisha crossed over the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah and those waters rolled back and the LORD cleaned up the cursed water of Jericho we are given the pattern once more of the people of God under the leadership of a divinely chosen servant seeking the conquest of the Promised Land (think of Joshua and the Judges). Yet the patterns of covenant breaking and curses persists 坚持 while a patient God looks on a rebellious people that forgets Him and turns to other gods. These events are part of that sorry cycle that on the one hand looks forward to the exile of the ten tribes and on the other of the gathering of the lambs from around the world in the era of Pentecost that we live in today.

I bring to you the Word of the Lord under the theme:

The Lord Saves His People From the Aramean Army: 1. The Omniscience 全知的 of God

2. A Supernatural Spiritual Reality 3. Revelation to Jew and Gentile

The Omniscience of God It seems that the healing of Naaman, if it happened before the event of II Kings 6:8-23, did not bring any peace. We recall that the reason Israel is suffering the marauding 劫掠 bands of raiders is precisely because the days of obedience and the pure worship of God that characterized the days of David and Solomon were but a long forgotten memory. Israel of course desired the power and the peace that accompanied it but they seemed so quickly to forget that it was the LORD who gave them that peace. It was the Lord who watches over the city and it is the LORD who builds the house (Psalm 127). Israel had forsaken 唾弃 God and the covenant curse was upon them.

Then God intervenes 介入! It is truly a remarkable thing. It reminds us when the LORD sent Elijah back to Ahab. Israel—and certainly Ahab and Jezebel—had not repented and yet God sent rain. He, however, did not do that until He roundly defeated Baal at his own game. The LORD sent fire from heaven and then sent rain and Baal did nothing because Baal is nothing. Now too the LORD by Elisha comes to aid of his still unrepentant people and He will show that He alone is God.

The King of Aram like any man of battle strategized 战略. He, we notice, is like the kings of those days very involved with the battle planning and travelled with the army. They would camp and lay siege 围城 to a surrounding area. Rather than destroy the city and its buildings, they would pillage 掳掠 taking food, animals and as we learned from the story of Naaman even took the children to be slaves. It must have been an unsettled time for the covenant people. Aram had grown in strength and on her own Israel it seems could no longer protect her borders and the king Joram was not able to protect his people.

But the Lord could! Every time the king Aram made a plan Elisha by the “power of seeing” as the older versions have it, knew exactly where the king of Aram was going to set up camp. The English in our version is a little bit hard to understand, but the “Beware of passing of that place” (vs. 9) means do not neglect the placing of a contingent of soldiers lest the place be over run.

We note that when Joram listens good things happen. Israel is now protected by the Word of the Lord given to Elisha. The King obeys the Word of the Lord and Israel is safe! And the King of Aram? Well, he is fit to be tied. He is frustrated. He looks inward and is convinced there is a leak in his inner circle. But that is not the case. The men however seem to know about Elisha. They too must have had their spies and they report that Elisha knows what is being spoken in the king’s bedroom.

This is our God? How does the psalmist put it?

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me; your right hand will hold me fast. (Psalm 139:7-10)

It is awesome to think about. How many people are on the planet right now? Billions of people; the Lord knows what is being spoken in every bed room, hut, prison cell or hospital bed. Even the voiceless He hears and He knows! He knows all things! He confounds 混淆, 挫败 the plans of men and makes them as if they were mice 老鼠. And where are the gods of Aram now? They are nothing. Where are their gods we ask! Our God is in heaven! He does whatever He pleases. The king of Aram is frustrated by our gracious God who comes to His people who do not deserve it but will experience the goodness of the Lord. And for a time they are safe from their enemies.

It was Jesus who told us that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church. If God is for us who can be against us? In Christ, the Word made flesh we come to know this same mercy and protection. We do not deserve it. It is all of grace. The Son has come and has died to save us from Satan, death and all of our enemies. For the battle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities 公国. But our God knows all and sees all! Our God reigns! Blessed is His holy name. And the Bible says of the gods of that age and this age:

But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them and so will all who trust in them. (Psalms 115:4-8)

The gods of Aram are nothing and the king of Aram sits alone and frustrated and furious 愤怒. Like so many in our day and age who will not confess the name of the LORD, the king of Aram turns his fury 怒气 toward Elisha. Kill him and the problem will be solved (think of the 20 students killed in Nigeria this past week because they are Christians). Then we see the futility 徒劳, 无用的 of a man who puts his trust in idols and in fact himself.

A Supernatural Spiritual Reality Aram’s intelligence had pin-pointed 针点 the whereabouts of Elisha in Dothan. A large army was sent with chariots ready for the attack in the early hours of the morning when Elisha and the town would be the least

ready. (You would think that if Elisha knew the king's very words that he would know that they were coming.) But there were orders and they were to be obeyed. Aram had a problem and by their might they would bring an end to it.

Elisha's servant was up early that morning and saw the enemy camp and from his human perspective he knew that all looked bleak 严峻. His eyes were not open to the spiritual reality that was going on. Frankly most of us are like that. We are of course unaware of the spiritual battle because we cannot see it. Yet we know it rages and we know that we are part of it and that the LORD protects us and Christ the church until it is time to go home or when Christ will come and put an end to it all. But now the servant looks and he is scared. He cannot see. But the servant will be blessed by God's servant Elijah with the gift of vision. Then you see once more the mercy of God and how it is alone He who gives faith and the eyes to see.

What lovely words. These are the words of hope not only for Elisha but for the church persecuted and attacked all over the world and for us too. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (verse 16) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see! (Hebrews 11:1)

Elisha prayed and the servant's eyes were opened. And behold there was a multitude of the heavenly host. The fiery horses and chariots of God surrounded Elisha! The Holy Spirit has given us this story that we too can believe! We must read the stories with the eyes of faith. We read of Michael who fights for the Lord in Daniel. We read of guardian angels that care for the elect and the ministering spirits of God. We recall Jacob going to face Esau able to see the angels of God (Genesis 32:2). It was not so many days before the time of our story that Elijah was taken up to heaven accompanied by a chariot of fire with fiery horses

If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. (Psalm 91:9-12)

In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." (Hebrews 1:7)

The Lord God would protect his servant. The Word was in the land and the servant of the Word has work to do yet. The all knowing God is also the God of the supernatural spiritual world that science will never be able to prove or delve into. We are in the realm of faith and the spiritual. This comes by believing the Word. We must believe the Word. We look to God even now to give us the eyes of faith that we may be comforted in this world.

We note that for a moment. When it was time for an attack on Elisha, the LORD sent protection. When it was time was time for the attack on Christ, our Lord was left on His own. His fight was deeper. He had to go into the pit of the Spiritual realm of darkness. He had to suffer the cross and to die to take away our sins to bring us redemption. Now the Son of God commands with authority to send us into the world as word bearers and we live in the blessed assurance that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against us because Christ has defeated that crafty 狡猾的 serpent Satan. If the king of Aram is frustrated then what can we say of the eternal frustration of Satan and his hosts?

Aram's gods are nowhere to be found. Our God has vision and He gives vision. Aram has idol gods who are blind as the material they are made from. Those who make them will become like them!

Revelation to Jew and Gentile Elisha prayed once more and the soldiers of Aram were blinded. What we need to understand there is not a total blindness but rather a confusion of vision. This is why they could come to Dothan and Elisha could say that they were in the wrong place. This is all part of what is called "the ruse 谋略 of war"¹. Of course they were in the right place but Elisha now will march the blinded troops to Samaria so that the all will know that the Lord is God!

It must have been an amazing procession. The gates of Samaria open up and Elisha is leading soldiers who though mighty in weaponry are as docile 温顺 as sheep. He just leads them the 14 or so miles² north and marches them into

¹ A trick or use of wiles 诡计 to fool people to get them to do what they do not want to do.

² 22 kilometers.

town! Joram wants to know what to do. Should he execute them? But Elisha appeals 恳求 to the code of the day and commands the king to feed them.

Elisha the prophet has now fulfilled once more the office of priest via prayer and now king by this leadership. Truly God is exercising His dominion 主权 through the servant even as He does now in Christ Jesus. And what are we given to see about God?

The Lord God is gracious and compassionate. He is slow to anger. He does not chide 责骂 forever and He certainly does treat us our sins deserve. He spares these Gentile marauders 掠夺者 even as He had shown kindness to the Gentile Naaman. Our God is not the vicious 恶毒 and blood thirsty gods of the pagans 异教徒. Rather He feeds those who oppose Him! Israel and Joram in Samaria must see it too. The Lord God had moved in such a way that the pillaging and all that went with it stopped.

Yet we wonder now: where is the praise and worship of the LORD? Israel and Joram are more than willing to accept the good things from God and yet we do not read anything about praise and worship that ought to have accompanied such an event.

This is the sad story of the crumbling of Israel's theocracy 神权政治. The downward cycle of faith and rebellion towards apostasy 背教 that started already in the days of the judges and predicted by Moses and Joshua continues towards the ruination 毁灭 of the 10 tribes. In some six centuries after Israel entered the Promised Land, the glory of Israel is lost and those who were given the land will be cast out. So God makes Himself known not only in Israel but in Aram as well. He reveals Himself first in mercy so that all would bend the knee. We too have come to know the mercy of God this morning. We have seen this God revealed in the Word by the Word that is Christ. The Spirit speaks to us this morning again and warns of us the battle that we find ourselves in as the church of Christ. We are filled with the blessed assurance that the Lord is on our side and even His fiery chariots and horses surround the elect. The gates of Hades 阴间的大门 cannot defeat us. Now we must sound the praise of God! Now we must rejoice for as Elisha took charge the Lord Jesus is our King. He gives us by His Spirit eyes to see and ears to hear so that we are living and praising beings alive as our God is living and being!

Beloved the battle is on and it is fierce 激烈. The gods of this age are ruthless and demanding even if they are but the figment 虚构 of some one's imagination. But we go into the battle with the Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit. We go forward with the good news that there is forgiveness and that our God will not turn any away who knock, seek and ask. Our God is in the heavens and He does as He pleases. He is all knowing and there is no one who escapes His attention. He commands the angels and the saints are preserved so that on this earth both the faithful and the unfaithful will know that He is God. One day the Lord Jesus will come and the blind eyes will see and at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess him King of Glory! Our help is in the name of the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.

So we see then that these stories are well put together by the Spirit who teaches us that the LORD was revealing himself in the Promise Land to covenant breakers and pagan alike through His servant Elisha. Elisha as prophet, priest and king in part we see in Christ and our eyes are directed to our precious Lord. Do not be afraid for those who are with us are greater than with them! In all things we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus!

Stand Up, stand up for Jesus

The Strife will not be long;

This day the noise of battle,

The next the victor's song.

To Him that over cometh

A crown of life shall be;

He with the King of Glory

Shall reign eternally.

Amen