

II Kings 6:24-7:2 Siege of Samaria Part 1

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Elisha like Elijah before him was called to leave family and friends and take up the work of bringing the Gospel to an ever increasingly apostate Israel. Jehoram on the throne was pretty much a throw back to his father Ahab before him. God had performed acts of salvation in grace and mercy shown to an obstinate 固执king and country and they repaid Him for His grace by wreaking 发泄havoc 毁灭and butchery 屠杀upon the enemy. Still for a time the Syrians left Israel and Samaria alone. However though the raiding stopped, Syria now came in full glory and laid siege 围城to Samaria. The rejection of grace by the people of God was not met with the iron fist of God who through this act once more pursued the love and devotion of His people. That of course also meant that the righteous would suffer with the unrighteous, but the text makes clear that there were still some godly men there and that the Lord would take care of them so that it would also be true that the unrighteous would for the sake of the righteous taste and see that the Lord is good.

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

The Word is Revealed in Besieged Samaria

1. The Word Fulfilled 2. The King's Response 3. Elisha's Message of Hope

The Word Fulfilled Those were dark and dismal days to be sure. We imagine that when Syria came and it seems rather undeterred to the gates of Samaria, the country folk would have run to the city for her walls of protection. But once the city was locked up there was no way for food to get in or out. It is a rather remarkable strategy if not sinister in its character. The thinking goes like this: If we can starve the people out, we can take the city whole. If we attack the city and win there is likely a lot of rebuilding to do. Hitler used this strategy with Stalingrad and in the annals 史册of history we read of the corpses 尸体piling up with no place to dispose of them, food running out and all manner of misery, disease and hunger filling for many their last days. Well this is the same sort of reality that came upon Samaria. Food was growing scarce. A donkey's head, the least desirable part of that unclean animal was going for an exorbitant 80 shekels of silver. To give you a comparison, in I Kings 10:29 we read: "They (Solomon's court) imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver and a horse for a hundred and fifty." Now a donkey's head was going for more than half of a prized horse! We also read that a quarter of a cab of seed pods went for five shekels. It would take the common laborer nearly six months to make that kind of money and a quarter cab works out to about a third of liter or 2 ounces. By the way many good translations and in fact most of the older translation tells us that it was not seed pods but rather dove's dung as you can see from the footnote on the page there of the NIV. The ESV translation uses "dove dung" as does the NKJV. Apparently people would scoop up these droppings believing that there was some sort of nutritional value in them. Seed pods of course had very little nourishing about them and yet a half year's of wages would get you a third of a liter. This as you can imagine must have been terrible.

What do you do then? What does the poor man do? What does it really matter if you are rich? Conditions are wretched; the city is first overcrowded and then teeming with the dead. Kosher laws are thrown out the window and if you've got the money, price is no object and soon the food vendors will have lots of money but no food as well. What do you do as a father as you seek the well being of your family? Then you seek only to survive? Do you go to an animal way of life? Is it dog eat dog?

Beloved where is the love? Where is the powerful looking out for the weak? Why would you sell a donkey's head to a man or woman for such an extravagant amount of money when you know he or she is starving? You can just hear the answers, "But it is good business," or "It is an opportunity and if we don't then someone else will." The people of Israel were certainly no beacon of light in the horrible darkness.

What if you are a single mother and you have children to feed? What do you do then? You try to feed your children! A woman looked to the king for help! The king brushed her off in his frustration what could he do for her if the LORD was not doing it! This is crass and of course the king blames the LORD taking no responsibility for the wickedness of his regime and the continued impure worship. No, he cannot help the woman! Then the woman shares with him a most disturbing tale. She and another mother in order to ensure their own survival made a deal that on one evening they would eat her son and on another they would eat the other's son. This already is diabolical. Desperate 危急times sadly often bring out the worst in people. Where is a mother's love for her son? She and her friend ate the son! But now when it came for another serving of a human boy the other mother hid the son. Murder, cannibalism, infidelity, this is wickedness of the most vile sort. So much it staggers even the king who likely himself is no stranger to gross sin.

Now we entitled this first point the fulfillment of the Word and that might strike us as strange. But this story fits into the whole of Scripture and particularly the Old Testament. Moses in his farewell address proclaimed some pretty horrible predictions. He said,

De 28:23 The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron.

II Kings 6:24-7:2 Siege of Samaria Part 1

Dt 28:24 The LORD will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed. Dt 28:25 The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. Dt 28:26 Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. Dt 28:27 The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering 溃烂 sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured. Dt 28:28 The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind.

When the king of Israel heard of the atrocity of two women eating a dead boy perhaps he did not know, but we know that the curses of God were raining down upon the covenant breakers of Israel. When people are paying half the price for a live horse to buy a donkey head to eat the curses of God are raining down upon the nation. When a man must spend nearly 2 months work for half a liter of chaff or pigeon droppings in the land, that ought to be flowing with milk and honey, is being cursed. So now the lamp stand is ever close to being snuffed 鼻烟 out. Israel has lost her first love. Israel still tolerates Jezebel and idol gods. The LORD He is God and He will not be mocked!

The King's Response The king was besides himself. He took to the streets and in Israel the people had access to the king. The king was called upon to help. The king was not the LORD. He has come to that understanding at least. He does not say "Am I Baal?" He calls out to the woman about the LORD. If the LORD cannot help how can he? There is cynicism there. There is blame too. It is the LORD who is at fault here.

We note that the king tears his clothes when he hears of the horror of the boy dead and eaten. Cannibalism 同类相食 had come to Samaria and he could do nothing about it. He may have perhaps enforced the law we think. He might have carried out justice but this son of Ahab was like Ahab petulant and in many ways refused responsibility. So rather than lead the people in national repentance as the King of Nineveh in the days of Jonah, the king take a vow upon his lips to behead Elijah.

Why is Joram so angry? Well did you notice that he was walking around with the coarse hair coat of mourning under his robes? He is in his way doing it half way. This is the Cain offering. He does it because he seeking something. He has made himself uncomfortable in order that the LORD might answer his request for relief. He is doing the right thing and then he hears of this story of the human butchers and he loses faith. Why isn't the LORD helping? No, he rends his clothes and now all can see that he is in sackcloth and ashes but he does it like the pagan that he is and when the LORD does not answer his reply like Cain before, he turns his attention to the existence to the one whom God does answer. Cain took Abel out back and killed him. Joram makes ready to kill the prophet of God. "May I be dead if Elisha's head is still upon his shoulders by the end of the day," he says. Ahab's voice sounds once more, "Is that you; troubler of Israel?" The LORD is angry and so it must be Elisha's fault and if Elisha is dead it will all be better! Joram will feel better. Once more we see the failure of Israel's theocracy because the king does not acknowledge God as King and does not bow before the LORD and so once more they seek the life of the prophet. He sent his servant out.

Another servant sat with the elders of the city. It is ironic that they were with God's servant and not with the King. The city gate was the place of business and justice. Elisha was given by God to understand that the servant was coming for him. But he also knew that while the King had some time to think about it he had changed his mind and set off after the servant to hopefully stop the dreadful execution. Elisha had the man bolt the door so the servant couldn't get to him. The king of course was granted access and spoke to Elisha.

The LORD was not yet done with this rebel king. He stepped in and it is not only that Elisha was still alive but this murderer, literally in the Hebrew, "son of murderer", was not guilty of killing the anointed of God. God stepped in that the King might yet taste and see that the LORD is good! And He is good.

Joram wondered out loud about the LORD. He understood that this thing was of the LORD but he believed that this was the end. Samaria would be over taken, the dead piled up. It was finished. But there was this little glimmer 微光 of hope in his suggestion: "This disaster is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"

Now it was time for the good news of redemption that only God could provide. It was the good news of abundance and it was the good news of miracles. *Let children hear the mighty deeds which God performed of old, which in our younger years we saw and which our fathers told. He bids us make his glories know, the works of power and grace that they convey his wonders down to every rising race.* (Psalter Hymnal # 150 verse 1)

Elisha's Message of Hope The LORD by means of Elisha gives us a good example of how to handle adversity and struggle. He is obedient to the call upon His life and that is to bring the Word of the Lord as given to Him and called by Him. Elijah might have in this case relished the siege and the sorrow it had brought but not

II Kings 6:24-7:2 Siege of Samaria Part 1

Elisha. He sees that the LORD will once more rescue His people and he is excited about the message that he can bring for it means salvation for God's people and it means justice for the enemies of God!

^{2Ki 7:1} **Elisha said, "Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the LORD says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."**

People are going to eat once more! Doesn't remind you of the good God who did not forsake Adam and Eve? Doesn't it call to mind the gracious God who did not forsake wicked Israel at Sinai after the Golden Calf debacle and the cowards at the borders of the Promised Land? Once more God will be gracious and good and He will be patient not wishing that any would perish but that all would turn and acknowledge Him (II Peter 3:9). His forgiveness is truly superhuman and divine!

^{Ps 103:8} The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

^{Ps 103:9} He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever.

The prediction seemed rather remarkable to the King's chief aid. How can this be?

^{2Ki 7:2} **The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, "Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" "You will see it with your own eyes," answered Elisha, "but you will not eat any of it!"**

Where is the food going to come from? There were no crops outside? Where was the wheat going to come from, man? Pathetic fool! This is not the man of little faith! This is the man of no faith! This man is a rebel. What is there God cannot do? He has destroyed the prophets of Baal and sent rain upon the land. He had given Joram victory when he did not deserve it and the chief aid must have seen all of that if at least not heard all about these mighty acts of the LORD! God by Elisha had healed Naaman and a battle was averted 避免. What of the Torah? The King was to rule with Torah by his side so he would recall the manna in the wilderness! Then the king would recall that God had provided water in the desert from a rock! Then he could recall that God is good to those who fear him! If they would be obedient they would live long in the land the Lord gave to them.

This time the LORD did not send fire from heaven. The chief would see and then he would die. Food was coming- albeit- still expensive but food for all and not donkey brains but the real stuff of nourishment and food in abundance, yes food for all. Our God is an awesome God.¹

The church stood there, the false lover looking for help and safety in the arms of the deserted faithful bridegroom once again. The rebellious looked to the faithful God and God was good to save His people from a temporary difficulty because the Israel's problem was not severe emptiness of stomach but emptiness of soul. Like Joram, Israel wanted God's blessing on their terms. This is the pattern that would continue right unto the days of the exile and even to the days of Christ Jesus. Jeremiah saw this when he prophesied of the need for a new covenant where God would change the hearts of His people. Paul speaks of this when he wrote to Titus that "The grace of God which has appears to all man it teaches us to say no to ungodliness" (Titus 2:11). The church needed the Spirit of God and the Church needed the power of the resurrection that only Jesus could give. That Word of hope for Israel was the Word of Christ to them. The name "Jesus" means "the Lord saves". And He does save! His grace demands our response of obedient love, honour, worship and praise. We too must for the sake of Christ resurrection believe in the abundance of the love of God and there never ought to be in our hearts the murmur of cynicism.

The story then is about balance. It is about the balance of God who uses even bad things to create a Gospel moment. Certainly Canada and the United States are not the church in the way that the nation of Israel back then was. We live in a society however where the false religions are respected and even are allowed to flourish by an increasingly wicked people who have turned their backs on the church and the good news of grace. Yet we must in hope and expectation sound the clarion call of the Gospel. God has brought salvation. Our God will send! Hope in God for He really is good and glorious! Amen.

¹We remember that though Adam was cursed and thorns and thistles would come upon the land he still would eat! God is good to those who are not! This is the God of Grace!

II Kings 6:24-7:2 Siege of Samaria Part 1
