

2nd Kings Chapters 5-6 – John Karmelich

1. This is one of those lessons where it is best to explain briefly the stories that take place within the chapters and then give my lesson title and why we should read the whole thing. Here goes:
 - a) The common character in all the stories in these chapters is a bible prophet named Elisha. He performs a number of miracles with the goal of leading others to closer to God.
 - b) The first story is about a foreign general who has leprosy. The short version is God uses Elisha to cure the leprosy and this foreigner then converts effectively to Judaism.
 - c) Then we read of a neighboring king who wants to conquer Israel. Whenever he plans to conquer that land, God tells Elisha of the king's plans and Israel wins a battle. The foreign king then sends an army to go have Elisha captured. A wonderful miracle takes place in this story where Elisha shows his assistant God's army of angels surrounding this human army that wants to capture Elisha. God somehow blinds the army and Elisha leads them into the Israelite capital city. Elisha then orders that foreign army be fed and sent home.
 - d) After that whole mess is over, we next read of Elisha traveling with a group of "prophets in training" to a new home by the Jordan River as they outgrew their existing place. There we get this strange story of one of those prophets accidentally losing a borrowed ax head in the river. The point of the story is that Elisha performs a miracle of bringing that piece of metal to the surface. It seems like the kind of miracle any decent magician today could perform. The reason for this miracle was to teach those students to trust God in the little things as well as the big things in life.
 - e) Next, that same foreign country king that tried to capture Elijah earlier, still has his heart set on defeating Israel. He has his army surround the capital with the intent of starving it out. The story moves inside the city to show how rare food was getting as this effort went on. We won't find out how God worked to save the Israelites living in that city until the next lesson. A key point is the same king who trusted in Elijah to rescue him in the earlier story is now blaming Elisha for this famine. Chapter 6 ends with the king wanting to kill Elisha and blame him for the city's problems. What the king failed to realize was that the nation was being punished for their collective turning their back on God. Among many other things, we'll discuss why that is, in this lesson.
2. OK, with that overly complicated summary of these chapters given, let me give my lesson title and explain how it ties to these events: "How God works when life gets impossible". What all of these stories have in common is problems far beyond our ability to solve or deal with. They are all situations where one says in effect, "Only God can help us now, there is nothing we can do."
 - a) Personally, I find God does His best work when we truly say something like that. That way He and He alone gets the credit for solving the problem. God's goal is to get as many people as possible to trust Him to guide their and our lives. When we individually or as a society turn our back on God, there is a price to be paid. In the first few books of the bible God lays out the punishment for turning from Him and we see that punishment literally coming to pass in the final story of these two chapters.
 - b) The great lesson in these two chapters is to learn how God works when the situation in front of us seems impossible to deal with let alone solve. It is times like that where God is saying to us, "Trust Me, even now, especially through this". Despite what you are going through, I am here. You don't see the world as I see it, and the angelic beings that exist to manipulate the world as I want it to go. I (God) know its hard for you right now. Still I want you to trust Me through this as yes, I can and do work what is impossible for us to comprehend especially in situations where it appears like there is nothing else we can do to make our problems better and go away. With that said you'll find the rest of this lesson upbeat as we see how God can and does work in impossible situations.
 - c) With that said, it's time to get started with the text itself.

3. Chapter 5, Verse 1: Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.
- a) The last lesson focused on five specific miracles by a prophet in Israel named Elisha. In effect the same story continues here as we are still focused on what he accomplished in his time as a prophet in Israel. Here the chapter starts by naming a non-Israelite army officer named Naaman. A big reason this story is in the bible, is that Elisha is going to perform a miracle never performed in the Old Testament. There is no other record of anyone being cured of this disease other than when Jesus did it roughly a 1,000 years later. This story is here to show us that God is not just interested in prophets leading Israelites closer to Him, but also non-Israelites who are interested in serving God.
 - b) Let me describe this story in a way that most Christians can relate to: Most of us realized that before we dedicated our lives to serving Jesus, God had a hand on our lives. We can look back at our lives before we were saved and realized how God was guiding us at that time. I mention that, because in effect we'll see this for this army commander Naaman.
 - c) Speaking of Naaman, let's get back to this verse. If you have been following along with the story to date, you may recall me saying that Aram was a country east of the Northern king of Israel. It is roughly Syria today. Apparently Naaman was an army general and a good one at that, as he won great victories for "Syria".
 - i) There are two key words to remember from this verse. The first is the word LORD in all capitals. That means that God Himself was giving this foreign man victories. That's why I state that once you realize God runs over our lives, we can look back and see His hand in our lives even before we were saved. That's the case here.
 - ii) The second key word is leprosy. This was a horrible disease that still exists to this day in the Middle East. Think of it as "visible cancer". That's because the earliest sign is that it causes one's skin to turn white. Eventually one will lose the ability to feel pain. One loses one's nails and even limbs can fall off. It's a horrible thing to live with and a difficult way to die. In Leviticus, Chapters 17-18, God lays out how we are to recognize that disease and isolate those who have it. The bible does not say to kill those who have it, just to isolate them so it doesn't spread. I state all of that because other nations didn't isolate the victims of this horrible disease and that is the case of Naaman here.
 - d) Consider the fact that here was this non-God fearing man with a horrible disease. If you get nothing else out of this chapter, it shows that nobody is beyond God's reach nor is there any suffering that God can't deal with.
 - i) But John, you said in the last lesson that Jesus didn't come to earth in order to cure whatever ails us, but He came to lead people to salvation. That's why to this day God allows a lot of believers to live with all sorts of difficult things. Yes, all of that is true. At the same time, God does perform specific miracles on specific people in order to draw those people closer to Him. That's what we have in this story. I also think that when we see people who already trust in Jesus confined to a wheelchair or suffer with a horrible disease we don't see miraculous cures all the time. That's because God is teaching those people to trust Him through that pain and that's the lesson He's trying to get us to remember in our own difficult situations.
 - ii) With all of that said, it's time to get back to the story itself.
4. Verse 2: Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."
- a) Speaking of going through horrible things, imagine being captured as a young child and taken away from one's family. That's exactly what happened here. Odds are good that she may have seen her parents murdered and now she has to live under this leper.

- b) Coming back to leprosy, Israelites associated that disease with sin. In fact, if one reads those two chapters in Leviticus that focus on this disease, the bible never says how to cure one of it. It just teaches how to recognize it and isolate those who have it so no one will be hurt by it. This leads me back to the girl who was captured. We don't know how old she was when she was taken captive, but she knew enough about her Jewish roots that there was a great prophet who lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel named Elisha. This girl believed that Elisha could cure someone of leprosy, even though no such miracle has ever been recorded in the history of Israel. It's probably more like this girl believed, that man has great power from God and therefore he (Elisha) can do anything if it's God's will.
- i) All of that is relevant as this girl now lived as a servant of the wife of the leper. It is also apparent that in this role, she cared about the life of her "adopted" father.
 - ii) To put this in our language, instead of complaining about how horrible our life is under whatever it is we have to deal with, we make the best of it and even try to teach others how God can help in the worst of situations. In effect this girl was a witness for God in a seemingly impossible situation.
 - iii) Anyway this girl is getting a message up the chain of command that Naaman can get help for this deadly disease. With that said, time to read on.
5. Verse 4: Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.⁵ "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."
- a) I don't know why, but the ridiculousness of this whole situation makes me laugh. To start remember that Naaman was a top army officer for the country of Aram. The king of Aram wanted to help Naaman because he brought the king victories and the king was visually aware of the fact this man had leprosy. Therefore the king organized a big gift to bring to the king of (Northern) Israel to say in effect, "Our gods can't cure this man of leprosy, but we know that your God has that power, therefore accept these gifts and cure this man."
 - i) It would be like saying, the god we worship can't get handle this disease so take these nice gifts and please solve the impossible for us.
 - b) How the king of Israel reacts to this seemingly impossible scenario is given in the next set of verses. Before I go there, let me explain what is a "talent" of gold and silver. The word talent is associated with a year's salary. Scholars say the horses traveling to the Israelite king had about 750 pounds of silver and a huge amount of gold. In modern equivalence this is over a million dollars in precious metal. My point is, it's a lot of valuable stuff that went on this little journey.
6. Verse 7: As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"
- a) The king of Israel reacts to this impossible situation by basically saying just that. I can't solve this issue. I'm not God. I can't cure that horrible disease. Besides my bible experts even tell me that the bible never says how to cure it and there is no known cure.
 - b) In summary, the king of Israel was afraid the king of Aram was trying to pick a fight and was using the demand to cure leprosy as the demand to prevent war. Also know that in the Middle East to tear one's clothes is a sign of sorrow, a little like how we might wear black clothing at a funeral today.
 - c) If you are wondering where I am going with all of this, just remember that God loves to work in our lives in impossible situations. It's situations like this where God can say in effect I and I alone get the glory because I can do what is impossible for people to do.
 - i) With that ray of hope entered in the picture, it is time for the prophet Elisha to step up to the plate for God in the next scene.

7. Verse 8: When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house.¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."
- Speaking of seeing humor in the text, the prophet Elisha somehow hears the news that the king had torn his garment. Maybe that's the kind of news that just spreads quickly.
 - Anyway, Elisha's reputation as a prophet has the respect of the king who is desperate for a solution so he doesn't have to go to war. Therefore, Elisha gets a message to the king for Naaman to travel to Elisha's house and he will deal with the leprosy issue. I can just see the king thinking, "I'll try anything. Therefore, Naaman, here is Elisha's address."
 - One reason I find this whole thing humorous is when Naaman makes it Elisha's home, we read that Elisha won't even come outside to greet this man. Instead Elisha has someone else go outside and tell Naaman to go wash seven times in the Jordan River, and then the visual sign of leprosy will be gone.
 - Remember that Naaman was a soldier. I'm sure he traveled with a group of people. I'm sure if he wanted to he could knock down the door of Elisha's home and demand that he come see him personally. The reason this scene played out the way it did, is because the goal is to get Naaman to humble himself in effect before the God of the Israelites. Since Elisha didn't come out to personally greet him, it's kind of like Elisha saying, "I can't wave a magic wand and make your leprosy go away. However, there is a God who rules over the universe that has the power to guide your life for His glory. Seek Him and if it is His will, He can cure you of leprosy, not me. Therefore Naaman, go wash in the Jordan River seven times and you will be cured.
 - To state the obvious, there is no magical formula about washing in that river to cure one of that horrible disease. The symbolic idea of crossing the Jordan River into Israel is the idea of trusting in God to guide one's life. Having Naaman dip himself seven times in this river is symbolic of complete (key word) trust in God. Just as the number seven is associated with God's completeness (as in the fact He rested on the seventh day), so the seven dip process ties to the idea of a complete trust in God to guide our lives.
 - However, at this point in the story, Naaman wasn't ready to humble himself that much to a foreign god. He just wanted to be rid of the disease and wanted Elisha to cast some sort of magic spell over him and that was that.
8. Verse 11: But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy."¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.
- John's loose translation: You (Elisha) want me to humble myself before your god? Don't you know who I am? Don't you know I've lead armies to win great wars? Don't you also know that the rivers where I live are bigger and better than the Jordan River? I don't want to change religions, I just want this horrible disease to go away. Now Elisha say some sort of magic spell or have me do some great deed to prove how worthy I am to be cured. But I don't want to have to humble myself in order for this disease to go away.
 - Believe it or not, that situation describes why most people won't turn to God. They want to prove their worth to God and not come to Him on His terms. Most people believe they deserve to go to heaven because their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. Even for us who understand what Christianity means, God loves to put us in situations where we say, "Hey God, you want me to be a witness to that person? I can't stand that person. Or He might say to us, You want me to sink "this low" in this situation and not rely upon what I can do well and just trust You? My point here is don't read this and think "Poor Naaman" but realize it is our own pride that keeps us from humbling ourselves before God at times.

9. Verse 13: Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.
- a) Time for more "loose translation": Hey Naaman, what have you got to lose? You're stuck with this horrible disease. You've traveled this long distance to get rid of it. All that this guy asks is a simple thing to go dip in a nearby river. Humble yourself. Give it a shot. It can't hurt and it can't make your skin any worse."
 - b) Bottom line is Naaman did as he was told, let go of his pride, and did the seven dip thing. Now that I think about it, it is amazing to me that Pentecostal churches haven't picked up on that ritual to cure disease. Maybe they do and I just don't know it. Anyway, the point is it worked. After dip 7, Naaman's flesh was normal.
 - c) Don't take this lightly. There has never been a recorded case in the bible of anyone having been cured of leprosy. Many Israelites through the millenniums suffered from it and had to be isolated from society.
 - i) In fact, Jesus Himself picks up this story. Jesus point was that many Israelites had this disease, but God only chose to help this foreigner out. (Luke 4:27). Jesus point was just as the Jewish people in his home town refused to accept Him, so God at times will work through foreigners who are more willing to accept Him than His own people. The fact that Jesus mentions this story is also His validation that He accepts "Kings" as part of the canon of the bible.
 - d) Speaking of God helping non-Israelites, it's time to get back to the story.
10. Verse 15: Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant." ¹⁶ The prophet answered, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.
- a) You would think that this is the end of the story and the chapter. This foreigner is now cured and everybody lives happily ever after. However, we're only half way through the chapter and the next section deals with both Naaman's and some Israelites reaction to this miracle taking place.
 - b) First, let's talk about the reaction of Naaman. It wasn't just, "Gee guy, thanks for the cure, I feel much better now, I think I'll go conquer some more nations!" He reacts by saying in effect I realize that your god is not just the God of the Israelites, but of the whole world. No other "so called god" can cure a man of this horrible disease. Whether or not this was a lifetime commitment or just a moment of joy, we don't know. All we do read is that he's so happy he's better he's willing to make "The God" his god. Personally, I think we'll see Naaman in heaven one day. I believe that once one truly commits their lives to God, He works on our hearts to keep them and us close to Him as long as we live.
 - c) The interesting part of the story here is that Naaman tries to offer a gift for Elisha's service and Elisha refuses to accept any present. I believe this is Elisha saying in effect, "I didn't do anything. I just want you to trust in God. He did the miracle. Now go live out your life trusting in the God of the Israelites to guide You to make a difference for Him. That is what Elisha is saying to him as well as to us.
11. Verse 17: "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. ¹⁸ But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also--when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this."
- a) Here we get the final requests of Naaman to Elisha. He asks for a bunch of dirt to take home to Aram and he asks permission for his duty to go in this foreign god's temple.

- b) Let me explain these events: As to the dirt, it was the belief in that culture, that a god is a local deity. The symbolic act of taking some dirt home is to say I want to worship the God that controls over this land. It's a little like the fact that Christians honor the fact that we worship a Jewish God. To state one of my favorite Christian proverbs, "The mistake that many Jewish people make is they fail to see Jesus as their promised Messiah. The mistake that many non-Jewish Christians make is they fail to see God as also a God of the Jewish people." My point here is simply that Naaman wants to remember for the rest of his life that the God of the Jewish people is the one who cleansed him of his disease. What does God demand of us Christians, is to remember that the "God of the Jews" is also the same one who cleansed us of our sins so that we can be with Him forever.
 - c) On that happy note, it's time to talk about the significance of the Rimmon Temple. To put it simply, this was the main god of the country of Aman. Remember that Naaman was a top army official. It would be his job to go to that worship service as part of his duty. He actually asks Elisha permission to carry on his duty despite the fact that He wants to be a servant of the true God.
 - d) All of that strange background leads to the next little half a verse:
12. Verse 19: "Go in peace," Elisha said.
- a) Notice that both in the case of the "dirt" and the traveling to the Rimmon Temple, Elisha did not say, "You don't have to carry Israelite soil home." He didn't say, "Here's a copy of the 10 Commandments (or a bible scroll) to go study." He didn't say, "avoid the temple of a foreign god at all cost". Instead Elisha just says go in peace.
 - b) I say all of that because the mistake we make in the Christian ministry is trying to give out too much information at once. God is more than able to handle other people. It's not our job to try to fix everyone in sight. It's better to give someone not enough information than to overload them with too much information. In other words, Elisha just said go in peace and didn't try to explain more about God to Naaman. I'm willing to bet that Naaman did learn more on his own about God on his own timing, but that's my speculation. The point for us is as a witness for God, be willing to give an answer to anyone who asks, but avoid the temptation to overload people with a here's everything you need to know about Jesus as they begin their new life serving Him. God is more than willing and able to lead others at His pace just as He did for our own lives.
 - c) Meanwhile, back to ancient Israel.
13. Verse 19 (cont.): After Naaman had traveled some distance,²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him."²¹ So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. "Is everything all right?" he asked.
- a) Here we get reintroduced to a minor character from the last lesson. Gehazi was a servant of Elisha. Short version here is that he was mad that Elisha didn't demand any of the gold or silver that this guy brought on the trip. It's like Gehazi was thinking, "We have to eat too around here. We should get something for our service to God. Elisha didn't have the guts to demand an offering, so I'll take matters into my own hands." Without reading anything else in this story, you know you are in trouble when you demand payment for being of service for God's work.
 - b) The bottom line here is that Naaman was traveling away happy that he no longer had this horrible disease. Gehazi was probably running toward Naaman with a full head of steam. When Naaman spotted him running, he stopped the chariot and said in effect, "Did I do something wrong? Did I forget something?" At this point, Naaman was anxious to serve the God of the Israelites. Gehazi took advantage of that guilt and wanted to use it for his own advantage. With that said, let's read on.

14. Verse 22: "Everything is all right," Gehazi answered. "My master sent me to say, 'Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.' " ²³ "By all means, take two talents," said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. ²⁴ When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left. ²⁵ Then he went in and stood before his master Elisha.
- a) Notice Naaman's desire to be pleasing to both God and Elisha. Naaman offered twice the silver that Gehazi demanded. This is a wonderful example of how not to be a witness for God, by demanding that we be paid for what God has done for us.
 - b) So are you saying we shouldn't give to our local church? Of course not. If our church is making a difference for God, we should financially support others willing to commit their lives to make a difference for Him. The difference here is about demanding payment for one's service versus asking to give out of the generosity of one's heart. But Naaman was willing to give here. Yes, but only after Gehazi was demanding payment.
 - c) Meanwhile, Gehazi is in big trouble here as we're about to find out.
15. Verse 25 (cont.): "Where have you been, Gehazi?" Elisha asked. "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered.
- a) If you think about it, going around the back of God's prophet is not a smart move. The point is Gehazi is about to realize he can't get away with this. This is a lot like when we sin and we realize God is watching us, but we go ahead and do it anyway. The point is sooner or later God in His own way will "call us on the carpet" and Elisha is about to do the same to his servant Gehazi here.
16. Verse 26: But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants? ²⁷ Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.
- a) The short version here is Gehazi was caught red handed asking for something he should not have been. His punishment was he now got the leprosy that Naaman had lost. The question becomes why punish him so hard for what was a sin and how does it affect us?
 - i) First, the issue is not salvation, but being a good witness for God. Gehazi in this situation became a bad witness because he was teaching that we must give credit to the messenger of God as opposed to God Himself. There is nothing wrong with helping those who are making a difference for God. It's wrong when we teach that we are required to do so in order to please God. That's the subtle difference here.
 - ii) So was this punishment too harsh? Gehazi went behind the back of Elisha in order to get stuff for himself. However, the punishment was a lifelong deadly disease. I could give us all a lecture on "Too much is given, much is required". The problem with knowing one's bible well is God now holds us more accountable. I suspect that this man is still saved, but he lost his witness for God based on what he did. That is the danger each of us face when we willfully choose to turn from Him. If that doesn't scare each of us, I don't know what will.
 - iii) With that said, we're moving on to Chapter 6 to see how else God is using Elisha.
17. Chapter 6, Verse 1: The company of the prophets said to Elisha, "Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us. ² Let us go to the Jordan, where each of us can get a pole; and let us build a place there for us to live." And he said, "Go."
- a) The short version here is the story now moves to Elisha dealing with a group of prophets he is teaching. The group is saying they are outgrowing where they are living and they all decide to go build a place together down by the Jordan River where they could meet.

- b) So if there are no chapter breaks, what is the transition here? The idea is God has placed his judgment on the "bad servant" and now we are reading how God is still working with those willing to make a difference for Him. In other words, we don't read any epilogue about Gehazi and the focus is now on those willing to be loyal to Elisha. With that said, Elisha agreed to the move, and off they went to build some simple shelters by the river.
18. Verse 3: Then one of them said, "Won't you please come with your servants?" "I will," Elisha replied. ⁴ And he went with them. They went to the Jordan and began to cut down trees. ⁵ As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron axhead fell into the water. "Oh, my lord," he cried out, "it was borrowed!"
- a) Apparently this training ground for new prophets asked, but did not demand that Elisha come with them. Elisha agreed. Then the story shifts to the fact that while one of those prophets were cutting down a tree, the axhead fell in the Jordan River. What is not stated is that iron was rare in Israel at that time. What is more important is that these prophets were very poor and paying back what was borrowed is difficult. (That's one thing that has not changed about ministry work. Poor people willing to give of their time as they don't have any great financial resources to give to God.) Meanwhile, this simple problem of an axhead falling in the water gave Elisha another opportunity to show the power of God in work in him. It's like saying to the students, do you want to know why we bother to go through all of this? Watch and see!
- i) The lesson for us is it is worth the cost of giving up everything for God. Yes there is the danger of being punished like Gehazi did, but there is also a great reward in being of service for God as we get to watch Him work in our lives. With that said, we're ready to go forward.
19. Verse 6: The man of God asked, "Where did it fall?" When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float. ⁷ "Lift it out," he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it.
- a) John's loose translation: Elisha did a small miracle where he threw a piece of wood at the spot where the axhead fell in the water, and then the axhead floated to the surface. What I want us to consider is why God used this method here:
- i) Consider what God did not do. Elisha didn't say, "axhead please come out of the water and fly back to the dry ground." He also didn't wade through the river and try to find it. So why this method? It taught the students that God is in charge of all things and if He wants to make iron float he can. Let's face it, God could have ordered the whole group to go diving and someone maybe could have dug it out. By this method, the group is learning that God can do what is impossible for man to do on his own. That is why Elisha threw the stick in the water. It is to say in effect "God work with what I have in hand." That is why Elisha threw in the water a piece of wood that that the prophets were using to build a shelter.
- b) Think back to the last lesson where Elisha multiplied jars of oil by working with what that woman had in hand. That is the same type of lesson being taught here. God is willing to take whatever we have, work with it for His glory. Think of this way: Ever wonder what it is that we can do to make a difference for God? Start by asking, what resources or gifts has God blessed us with already? Me, I write a lot so God is using that for this ministry. The point is to start by using what talents we have to make a difference for Him. In the case of these prophets, all they had was some wood, so Elisha used that to show how God can take that wood in order to use His power to make a difference in their world.
- i) Let me expand on this a little before we move on to the next story. If you are not sure what you are good at, ask others. It is usually something obvious. The point is to use what talents God gave us in order to be a witness for Him. If you're still not sure what to do, do something and see if God works through that method. That's the point to be learned here. OK then, we're now ready for the next story.

20. Verse 8: Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place." ⁹ The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." ¹⁰ So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places. ¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?" ¹² "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."
- a) If you think about all the miracles that Elisha has been performing in the last few chapters they have been very personal in nature. To say it another way, these were not miracles to benefit all of Israel, but usually one person or a small group that needed help. It's a little like Jesus' miracles that were usually small scale to benefit one person a time, while others became aware of those stories so they were recorded for billions to read.
 - b) With that said, this story is here if for no reason to show that Elisha also did perform some miracles that benefited all of Israel. To use a modern way of describing this paragraph, we are reading the first "phone tap" or a description of the government being able to read our e-mails as we type them. I use that comparison, because God was revealing to Elisha what was the attack plans of the neighboring king of Aram. The text implies that on more than one occasion the Israelites knew where Aram was going to attack. Apparently there were spies for Aram who informed the king that Elisha knows your most secret thoughts and that is how the king of Aram is discovering where they are going to attack next.
 - c) If you get nothing else out of this lesson, this is further proof that we shouldn't mess with a prophet of God. Such a man can if God wills, read the thoughts and war plans of those who are in charge. OK, so God again used the prophet Elisha in a mighty way. This did occur 2,500 to 3,000 years ago. Why should I care? Even if I accept the fact that God can know my thoughts and reveal them to others, I have enough to worry about. The way to look at this paragraph is to realize that the same God who did all of this, is the same God who wants to guide our lives for His glory. God in effect says to us, "Stop worrying and trust that I have a plan. I know you have problems and I want to guide your life for My glory. Let Me (God) be in charge and trust in Me to guide You through your issues."
 - i) While that sounds simple, the trick is always what to do next. The answer is to use biblical principals to make good decisions and trust that He is guiding us.
 - ii) With that bit of common sense advice given, it's time to get back to the problem of the moment of Elisha, the King of Israel and the king of this country called Aram.
21. Verse 13: "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." ¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.
- a) Again, I love to see the humor in this section. The King of Aram is thinking, "My enemy has this powerful prophet who can read my thoughts and tell their king where I am going to attack next. Let's go capture him so we can stop him or at least use that power."
 - i) He was not thinking, "Maybe their God is THE God". Maybe I need to trust in that God since I can't win on my own.
 - ii) However he was thinking, "He may have the ability to read my thoughts, but since I have a big army, I can surround him, because he can't be that powerful.
 - b) We are about to find out how wrong this king is. The king finds out that Elisha's living in a city called Dothan, which is in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
 - c) You would think that Elisha might be scared at this point, not to mention the other people living in that city. During the night a large army now surrounded that city with the most likely demand that Elisha be turned over to them in order to spare that town.
 - d) Coming back to the idea of having problems, as bad as ours may be, there is not an army surrounding us demanding that we surrender. OK, time to see Elisha's reaction.

22. Verse 15: When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.
- a) The first thing we read here is of a servant of Elisha seeing this army and panicking. The text doesn't say who that servant is, but I'm willing to bet it is not the same guy who got leprosy in the last chapter. Personally, I relate to this servant. I see problems all around me and I wonder, how am I going to get out of this one?
 - b) The good news is that this servant took the problem to Elisha just as you and I need to take our issues to God and say in effect, "I have no idea what we should do here, You are the "man of God". That is, if you can read foreign king's minds, you understand how God can help us through this situation.
 - c) By the way, for my newer readers, when you see the word "lord" in lower case, it does not refer to God, but just a sign of respect. It is like saying, "You, the guy in charge, help us as we don't know what to do next." Speaking of next, it's time to read on again.
23. Verse 16: "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.
- a) I have to admit, this is one of my favorite little scenes in the bible. The servant was very afraid of this large army surrounding the city. Elisha's reaction was that the servant has to see the situation from God's perspective. At that moment, Elisha's servant could now see a larger "army of fire" full of horses and chariots surrounding this other human army from the country of Aram.
 - b) The reason I love this story so much, is that it gives us a rare look into the spiritual world that is all around us. There are a few places in the bible (last few chapters of Daniel come to mind) where we learn of spiritual battles taking place behind the scenes in a world we cannot see. There is a view held by many bible scholars and myself that the world we see is not nearly as impressive as the world of angels and demons that exist all around us.
 - i) In other words what we see as a problem right in front of us, is not a problem from God's perspective because there is a whole world of angels all around us that we can't see. OK then, so why can't God open our eyes to see all of that? Why do we have to walk by faith and not see the spiritual battle going on all around us? This is another example of God saying to us, "Trust Me, even through "this". You can't see what I see or know what I know but the world is much different than how we perceive it with our own eyes."
 - ii) If you don't believe me, try to recall some significant problem from your life five or ten years ago. Do you still worry about that problem, or did God somehow get you through that issue? Of course He did, or you wouldn't be here reading this lesson at this moment. My point is the way to mentally handle whatever tough issue we have to face at the moment is to recall that what we can't see is far greater than whatever problems we do see. That is why we teach to turn our issues over to God and trust that He is working things out for His glory, period. Of course we still have to do whatever is necessary, but this is about letting go of our worries to trust that God is still guiding our lives.
 - c) Before I get back to the story, have you ever wondered how people don't "get it" when we talk to them about God? One of the secrets of being a good witness for God is to ask Him to open the eyes of those who don't see, like Elisha does here. That does not mean that everyone will be saved if we just say the magic words. However, asking God to open the eyes of those around us, does get us involved in the process of leading others to Him.
 - d) With that said, once again it is time to get back to the story. The positive news here is Elisha's servant is now a lot less scared as he got a glimpse into how God sees a situation.

24. Verse 18: As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.
- Even with God's "army" all around them, there was still the very real army about to attack them. I sort of picture Elisha here in a very gentle way simply saying, "Strike this army with blindness" to prevent them from attacking.
 - OK, let me ask the obvious question. When we have our very real problems right in front of us, why can't we pray for "blindness of our enemies" or say the problem to go away of whatever it is we have to deal with at the moment? First of all we should ask God for His will and not just ignore the possibility that He can rescue us in a miraculously way. The way I view life is God never promises us that we won't have problems. God promises us that He will see us through whatever it is we have to deal with in life. He will strengthen us to have the ability to face whatever it is we have to face in life if we ask Him.
 - As an example, God is providing Elisha with an escape plan here as he is blinding those who came to capture him. How that worked practically, I have no idea. I just trust in the fact that if "God is God" He can make those who don't have eyes see and those who have eyes not see whenever He wants to.
25. Verse 19: Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.
- I have to admit, as I read this verse, the first thing I thought of was the original Star Wars movie, where the hero was trying to get past an enemy's soldier check point. One of the good guys who had the "force" then told the enemy soldiers, "These are not the men we are looking for, let them pass". Then the soldiers let them go.
 - I say that as we read of something similar here. The text implies that the type of blindness that the enemy had was not like the kind where all of a sudden they can't see anything. It is more like that Star Wars movie scene where they all of sudden couldn't recognize Elisha for who he was. Then Elisha says to who we assume is the army leader, "Follow me and I'll take you to where he is." Then Elisha led this "blind army" to the capital city of Israel. (That's the northern kingdom of Israel.)
 - I can just see people thinking, "OK, Star Wars was fantasy. This too reads like fantasy. If we have problems we don't get blind army's being turned away. Yes I can tell you some great stories of people trying to make a difference for God and the great miracles that did occur in those times. The point is not that God will magically solve our problems for us. If we are doing His will, He will make it possible to work out His will on His timing, and that's the underlying point of this story. Speaking of this story, back to it.
26. Verse 20: After they entered the city, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.
- ²¹When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?" ²²"Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master." ²³ So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.
- Maybe it's just my mood, but I can't help but see the humor in this. Here is Elisha leading this foreign army into the capital city. To state the obvious the guards at the city gates are now going to warn the king that an army is being lead into their city. When the army got inside the city, Elisha prayed for the "blindness" (however that worked) to end and they realized where they were.
 - The king of Israel who personally knew Elisha because he told the king when this same army would attack in the past, asked Elisha nicely, shall we kill them. The king referred to Elisha as "His father". It is not literal, just a sign of respect like saying "lord" as Elisha's assistant did some verses back. Next, we get Elisha's response to the kings' request:

- i) Elisha said in effect, "These men didn't come into their cities with their guns aimed at our faces. They came in here lead by me. Therefore, since they are not treating us as the enemy, we should do the same. Therefore, let's give them some food and drinks and then send them on their merry way."
 - c) Let's be honest, if we were the Israelite king, we would think, "Here is the enemy right in my hand and here's the big chance to wipe them out once and for all". Instead the king is willing to trust Elisha just as the king did when Elisha told him where this same army did attack in the past. We learn in life that showing kindness to those who want to cause us harm does far more good than trying to wipe them out. In effect that worked. The last thing we read in this paragraph is of this foreign army stopped raiding Israel.
 - i) As I read this, I kept thinking about a friend's daughter who was being picked on at her school. Her mother told her to pray for those who picked on her and then to go do something nice for them. Yes, the bullying stopped. My point is bully's do know how to react to violence as that is what they know. They don't know what to do in cases of kindness and that is what worked here in 2nd Kings.
- 27. Verse 24: Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria.²⁵ There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.
 - a) Well, the army may have gone home on a full stomach, but the king of Aram, still wanted to conquer Israel. Sometime later this king organized a siege on Samaria. If you are not familiar with a siege that is where an army surrounds a city and literally starves out the population until they surrender. It's both a horrible and common technique that was used for millenniums for armies to defeat cities. Anyway that is what is happening here and we read as example of how bad things got that a donkey's head (non desirable food) sold for a lot of money as were "seed pods". That term refers to what some birds or animals do relieve themselves with to put it delicately. Bottom line is things are looking bad again.
 - b) Something to keep in mind is in effect that God predicted this. One can go back to text in both Leviticus Chapter 26, or Deuteronomy Chapter 28 and find predictions where God says in effect, "You turn your back on Me, I'll continue to make it worse and worse for you even to the point where you are starving and eat your own children (which is coming up in the next set of verses)." Bottom line here is we are reading of more examples of what is the danger of a society collectively turning their backs on God. Speaking of that dilemma:
- 28. Verse 26: As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, "Help me, my lord the king!"²⁷ The king replied, "If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?"²⁸ Then he asked her, "What's the matter?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son.'²⁹ So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we may eat him,' but she had hidden him."³⁰ When the king heard the woman's words, he tore his robes. As he went along the wall, the people looked, and there, underneath, he had sackcloth on his body.³¹ He said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!"
 - a) Time for my last "loose translation" of the lesson. The famine was so severe the king said to a woman there, there is no food (threshing floor is where they process food) and there is no wine (empty wine press) so how can I help you? The woman responded, yesterday we ate my neighbor's dead sons body because we're starving and today that neighbor wants me to kill my son for the next meal. The king heard all of this, tore his robes in sorrow about how bad things have gotten, and of all things blamed Elisha. The text implies it became public knowledge that the king was suffering himself and wanted to blame the same guy who he called "my father" in a loving manner at an earlier date when Elisha fed the same attacking army before.

29. Verse 32: Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. The king sent a messenger ahead, but before he arrived, Elisha said to the elders, "Don't you see how this murderer is sending someone to cut off my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold it shut against him. Is not the sound of his master's footsteps behind him?" ³³While he was still talking to them, the messenger came down to him. And the king said, "This disaster is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"
- a) To state the obvious here, Elisha was in the same town and suffered the same lack of food as everyone else. Somehow Elisha found out that the king blamed him for the famine and was now sending a messenger to kill Elisha. Elisha's reaction was not to open the eyes of the king to see an invisible army or strike the messenger with blindness. Instead he did what was practical and bolted the door shut.
 - b) So why no miracle here? The point is Elisha wanted to confront the king and the last part of the verse says that the king (his master's) footsteps are right behind him.
 - c) This king believed in God, but didn't trust in Him enough to guide his life. That king wrongly thought, "This must be Elisha's fault. He's the guy who talks to God all the time. He could end this if he wanted to. That same guy who I lovingly called "My father" not to long ago, must be punished for allowing this to happen.
 - d) Bottom line is the king is not turning to God for help, but "blaming the messenger". Again this comes back to God's negative promises in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that I stated a few pages back. In short, because the king refused to trust in God for His own life, or be willing to lead the Israelites toward God, the "punishment is now fitting the crime". This is God's warning to any nation that turns their collective back on Him, what could occur.
30. On this sad note, we have to end for the most part was an upbeat lesson on how God works in our lives when we do trust in Him and the consequences of what happens to us when we fail to trust Him with our lives. We're still in the middle of a story that does continue in the next lesson. Therefore, I'll give a quick ending prayer about sticking close to God and we'll call it a day.
31. Father, we know what You desire of us is an intimate relationship with You and to use our time to make a difference for You. We don't know what is going to happen to us in the future, so we give you our time, knowing it is the most valuable thing we own. Help us to give you our time and our resources so You can use them to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to trust in You through the good and bad times of our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.