

2nd Kings Chapters 7-8 – John Karmelich

1. My lesson title here is "How God guides us through difficult times". To explain why I picked that title, let me summarize the stories in these two chapters and then I'll come back to that title itself.
 - a) In Chapter 7, we'll read about a foreign army surrounding the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel with the intent of starving out the city so that they will surrender. Life got to a point where residents in that city were eating the carcasses of their own dead in order to survive. The prophet Elisha was living there too. Elisha predicted that the siege would end in one day and food would be sold cheaply.
 - b) Then God scares the foreign army surrounding the city by having them all think another army is about to attack them. I don't know (or care) how God did this, but He did. Then some lepers who lived outside the city walls discovered the army had fled and the lepers told those living in the city, it is safe to come out now. We also read of a king's top officer who didn't believe Elisha's prediction died in a stampede out of that city to get the food left after the foreign army fled. The bottom line is a happy ending to a horrible tragedy. I'll come back to the significance of that in a moment.
 - c) Next we read an epilogue to one of the people that Elisha helps in an earlier chapter. To make it brief, this is the woman who's son Elisha performed a miracle and brought back to life from the dead. Here, the woman is told there will be a famine for seven years and she needs to go live outside of Israel during this famine. When that famine was over, she comes back to visit the king of Israel to ask for her property back. The king just happened to be at that time listening to the stories about the miracles that Elisha has performed. He was in a good mood because of those stories and by "coincidence" she enters the palace at the same time. The king gives her back all she lost as well as the income she would have earned while she was gone. Bottom line is another tragedy ended on a positive note.
 - d) The final story here involves Elisha telling a servant of the foreign country king that he'll be king himself one day. Instead of waiting for that to occur, this servant then murders the current king. In fact by the end of the chapter, we'll read of that new murdering king attacking Israel. We don't read of a happy ending to this tragedy because it doesn't occur until future chapters. The point is God will use this tragedy to help bring an end to the worship of idols that is occurring in Israel at that time.
2. All of that leads me back to my title: How do we deal with tragedy. If you think about it, our lives on earth are in effect "one big tragedy". Hopefully we all have wonderful moments full of joy, but at the same time all of us are going to die one way or another. The story of the book of Kings is in effect one big tragedy as it starts with Israel at the height of power and will end before we know it with Israel being conquered as a nation. My point is simply that tragedy does occur in life and we have to deal with it the best we can.
 - a) The good news of these tragedies in each of these stories is that something good emerges from all of them. One of the strangest promises to believers in the bible is the concept that all things work together for good for those who trust in God. (Based on Romans 8:28). To be honest, it's tough to think how good came out of the worst of tragedies. I'm sure part of that answer has to do with eternal salvation for those of us who trust in Jesus. Still it is tough to deal with tragedies and believe me, these two chapters are full of them.
 - b) The question becomes why does God want us to study all these tragedies? Isn't our own life hard enough as it is? The answer has to do with perspective. Learning to develop an eternal perspective helps us to mentally deal with whatever tragedies we have to face in our lives. That is the big picture idea developed in these two chapters.
 - c) As you read these chapters, the focus should not be on "Oh those poor people who lived long ago." Instead it should be on, "OK, the next time I have to deal with a tragedy, what is it that God wants me to learn from this so I can draw closer to Him. Ok, ready to start:

3. Chapter 7, Verse 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."
 - a) Our story opens with the main character of the last few chapters, the prophet Elisha. To make it simple, he is predicting that the lack of food in the capital city will be a non-issue in the next 24 hours as prices for food will come back to normal.
 - i) To explain that, we have to recall a few facts from the last lesson. The capital city (Samaria) of the Kingdom of Israel is currently surrounded by a foreign army. The army is performing a "siege", which is to surround a city, and literally starve it out.
 - ii) After probably months of this siege, the residents inside are starving to death.
 - iii) Now we have Elisha saying in effect, "God cares about all of you people and you can stop worrying about your problem as it will end tomorrow."
 - b) You probably also need to remember that most of the people living in this kingdom are not trusting in God at this time. Despite the efforts of the prophet Elisha and the prophet Elijah before him, most of the residents here trusted in "Baal", which was a local deity that was supposed to provide food for them if they trust him. Now that everyone's starving, in effect God's got everyone's attention and He is saying, "Trust in Me as I can make your life tremendously better if you're willing to let go of your fears and again trust Me."
 - c) In case you didn't know, both flour and barley are crops. Therefore, God is not saying, there will be a flock of birds flying overhead that will be your food. He's saying that He will provide grain crops that they are used to having for a shekel, which was a common coin in their currency.
4. Verse 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!"
 - a) In this verse we get a comment from a court officer of the king. The text also says that the king was leaning on this man, indicating that he is a powerful official in Samaria. In effect he is rebuking the prophet by declaring, "If God could open up heaven to us, how would that be possible?" I believe this official is speaking for the king. Elisha's second comment is given here in Verse 2 when he tells the official, "You will see this happen, but you won't get to eat any of it, due to your lack of faith."
 - b) The point for you and me here is simply that God can do anything that is His will. The rebuke of Elisha's statement in Verse 2 is a lack of faith of what God can do. So does this mean that when life is not going well, by trusting in God, things will magically be better the next day? Not that I've experienced. What God desires of us is to trust Him through whatever we are dealing with and He will guide us through our own predicaments. Here was a whole city literally starving to death and God is saying, "Trust in Me, I know things are looking really bad, but I want to help so trust that I will work in this situation."
5. Verse 3: Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, "Why stay here until we die? ⁴ If we say, 'We'll go into the city'--the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die."
 - a) The scene now switches to just outside of the gate of the city. We read of four men who had the deadly disease of leprosy. They aren't allowed in the city because of that disease. Most likely the foreign army surrounding the city had a gap between where these disease men lived and their own camp surrounding the city. That's because this army didn't want to get the disease themselves.
 - b) Anyway, these four lepers who are starving as much as anyone else, said in effect, "Look we are dying due to the famine. If we can go into the city, we will die as there is no food there. We might as well go surrender to the Arameans as either they'll feed us or we die."

- c) It is sort of interesting to consider the fact that God is about to use a bunch of lepers to bring this famine to an end. There is a tendency for all of us to think, "We're not much of anything, how can God use us to make a difference?" Now here are four men who are dying of a horrible disease. It shows that God still cares for them and even wants to use them to make a difference in the world. Their story has been recorded for all of history to see how God can use a bunch of lepers to make a difference for Him.
- d) Meanwhile, let's read what they do.
- 6. Verse 5: At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, not a man was there, ⁶ for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!" ⁷ So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives.
 - a) The main point is these four lepers went to go surrender to the Arameans. When they reached the outskirts of their camp, no one was there. Here we get an editorial comment that God had somehow make this Aramean army think they are about to be attacked by the two most powerful forces of that time and era, the Hittites and the Egyptians.
 - i) Let me give a quick comment about the Hittites, since that is a new term in the book of Kings. The quick version is that they were a powerful force at that time in that era. At one time they ruled most of what we call Turkey today. Their empire spread into much of the Middle East. I remember watching a documentary on this group one time. The conclusion of how they disappeared was that they died out mysteriously due to a large plague on that nation. The point here is just that this group existed and they were a force to be feared at that time.
 - b) With that said, I've read a few comments about how this army fled. Some suggested that God put the sounds of footsteps in their heads. Others suggest it was that same invisible army of God that Elisha saw in the previous chapter. Personally, the "How God did it question" always bores me simply because I believe if God is God, He can do what He wants. However He made it happened, this large army fled away as fast as they could.
 - c) With that said, these four lepers were looking at the empty camp that was surrounding the City of Samaria, which again is the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- 7. Verse 8: The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.
 - a) For the four lepers who were treated as outcasts and were also starving like all the other Israelites there went from one extreme to the other. They pigged out on food and carried away all they could to their homes. When you have been living a life of poverty, hunger and facing a horrible death due to disease, it's hard to blame them for their reaction to go horde what they can while they can.
 - b) However, guilt is a powerful force and it even hits them in the next verse.
- 8. Verse 9: Then they said to each other, "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace."
 - a) The guilt they felt was something like, "There is far more than we could ever use. Next to us is a city full of starving people and even though the people living in that city treated us as outcasts, it is not right to keep this news to ourselves."
 - b) It is interesting that even with this deadly disease hanging over their heads, they all still feared God's judgment, so they all said, "It's very early in the morning, before the new day begins we need to tell the residents of the city what has happened."
 - c) I tried to picture this scene. I'm sure the guards at the gate knew the lepers and regularly told them to keep out. Now the lepers are telling them, "Come out everyone, free stuff!"

9. Verse 10: So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, "We went into the Aramean camp and not a man was there--not a sound of anyone--only tethered horses and donkeys, and the tents left just as they were." ¹¹ The gatekeepers shouted the news, and it was reported within the palace.
 - a) The lepers told the gatekeepers this news. I don't know if one of the gatekeepers went out to verify the news or if they trusted them. The point is the gatekeepers believed them and word then spread through the city. The way I picture it is the lepers showed the starving gatekeepers some of the food and stuff they had, and that convinced them to spread the news about what happened.
 - b) Let me add a few more verses here and then I'll talk about why we should care about it.
10. Verse 12: The king got up in the night and said to his officers, "I will tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know we are starving; so they have left the camp to hide in the countryside, thinking, 'They will surely come out, and then we will take them alive and get into the city.' "
- a) Apparently the king was a "worry wart". Remember that Elisha has just told the king to his face that in 24 hours food will be sold cheaply. Even with that in mind, the king's first thought was, "The army must be hiding hoping we would come out so they could capture us. The point for us of course, is about trusting God and His word. One has to remember that this king for most of his life did not put his trust in God. Therefore, even though he had Elisha say to his face what would happen, he lived in fear more than trust in God.
 - b) It is a natural reaction to be cautious and fear the worst. That instinct keeps us away from danger. What God desires of us is to take risks based on what His word teaches us. I'm not saying to jump off a cliff in God's name. I'm saying that when we are willing to take a risk in His name based on what His word teaches, it helps us to overcome our fears. That is what the king needed to learn here. Meanwhile, back to the story.
11. Verse 13: One of his officers answered, "Have some men take five of the horses that are left in the city. Their plight will be like that of all the Israelites left here--yes, they will only be like all these Israelites who are doomed. So let us send them to find out what happened." ¹⁴ So they selected two chariots with their horses, and the king sent them after the Aramean army. He commanded the drivers, "Go and find out what has happened." ¹⁵ They followed them as far as the Jordan, and they found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in their headlong flight. So the messengers returned and reported to the king.
 - a) Time for more of my "bottom line" here: The king sent men to go find out where the army had fled. The king's riders went as far as the Jordan River (the traditional boundary of the Nation of Israel) and no soldiers were found. The only thing these messengers found was the path the enemy left upon scattered with things they dropped in fear.
 - b) Then the messengers returned to tell the king that the invading army is long gone.
 - c) It may help to remember that this king was in fear of his life and the lives of those living in that city at that time. They were all living in starvation condition. When Elisha told the king literally less than a day ago that God would bring this to an end in one day, I'm sure those words were ringing through the king's head as he heard that the Arameans are now nowhere to be found.
 - d) OK John, cute story. However, we don't have Elisha's to tell us what to do with our lives and neither can you tell us what to do. That's not my job. My job like Elisha is to tell all of us that God exists, He wants to guide our lives and by trusting in Him and His word we can make a difference for Him by a willingness to take a risk.
 - i) Think of it this way: We could live our lives like lepers knowing that we can one day die of a horrible disease or suffer due some horrible condition like those that lived in that city. My point is to live for anything other than God, is effectively a horrible death sentence hanging over our head. Living to make a difference for God is the greatest and effectively only purpose one should have for living.

12. Verse 16: Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the LORD had said.
 - a) In the meantime we still had a city full of starving people, who now rushed outside of the city gates and plundered the camp where the Arameans were staying.
 - b) It may help to think about how an army actually starved out a city. A typical medieval city had large tracts of farmlands outside the city walls. The farmland is where most of the people worked. They went inside the city walls for protection and to trade what they had. My point is the foreign army camped in the farms and lived off that food while they were trying to starve out the city. I state all of that because that is why the citizens now had access to flour and barley that existed from that farmland.
 - c) The related point is exactly as Elisha had predicted, people were selling that stuff for the rock bottom price of a shekel, which was a common coin used in that time era.
13. Verse 17: Now the king had put the officer on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate, and the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died, just as the man of God had foretold when the king came down to his house. ¹⁸ It happened as the man of God had said to the king: "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." ¹⁹ The officer had said to the man of God, "Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" The man of God had replied, "You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it!" ²⁰ And that is exactly what happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died.
 - a) The chapter ends with some "fact recall". The chapter ends by repeats back Elisha' exact prediction of how much flour would sell for as well as how the king's officer would die. You may recall that the chapter opened with the unusual prediction that the king's officer would see all of this but would not get to appreciate it. In Verse 18, we read of the death of that officer. Again we come back to dealing with tragedies. What seems hopeless to us is a chance for God to show, "I'm in charge and if you are willing to let go and trust Me, I can deal with whatever we are dealing with at any moment in time".
 - i) That way, God and God alone gets the credit. I've lost count of the number of times in my own life where I've let go of a problem and God just "worked it out" for His glory. It is endless to describe the examples of how God does guide our lives for His glory when we're willing to let go of a problem and we willing to trust Him through whatever we are dealing with at the moment.
 - ii) I'm not saying all tragedies magically go away once we trust God. I'm saying that if we are willing to let go and trust God through difficult situations, He loves to work through our lives so that He gets the glory through whatever we are dealing with at the moment. With that positive thought stated, time for Chapter 18.
14. Chapter 8, Verse 1: Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the LORD has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years." ² The woman proceeded to do as the man of God said. She and her family went away and stayed in the land of the Philistines seven years.
 - a) With all of that talk about past and future kings, the story moves in a different direction. Back in Chapter 4, we had a story of Elisha bringing back to life a child who had died. Here we get an "encore appearance" of the mother who was described in that chapter as having some wealth. Elisha now tells her a seven-year famine is coming and she needs to travel out of Israel to go live in Philistine country until the famine is over.
 - b) Bottom line here is another tragedy is being described. A question occurs that if Elisha knew this was about to happen, why didn't he tell everyone to leave the country? Why only care about this woman? Doesn't God care for all people? Of course. However, God also wants to help those who trust in Him. This comes back to the Romans 8:28 principal that all things work out for God only (big only) for those who trust in God. We'll see that principal play out in this story here.

- c) With that said, let me pause and ask a few questions about this story:
 - i) The text just ended with a story about how the Israelites in Samaria were starving and God rescued them by having the army flee away. Now we read of a famine to last for seven years here. Is God being cruel here to the Israelites? The issue comes back to trusting in God. Apparently the Israelites were happy for the food, but did not take the time to show gratitude to God or trust Him to provide for the future.
 - ii) Remember that the king did not believe God could make flour and wheat sell at a cheap price during the last famine. That lack of trust in God still prevailed after the food ran out. This famine is God saying, "So are you going to trust Me or not? What do I have to do to get all of you to trust Me? Back when Elijah was speaking for me, there was a three and half year drought (1st Kings, Chapter 18). Now I've (God) have to go to more extreme measures as all of you still refuse to let me rule over your lives. Thus a new drought is about to begin that will last 7 years.
 - iii) Coming back to Elisha and the woman who had her child come back to life, notice what Elisha does not say, "Stay here while I miraculously feed you." Nor does he say to collect empty jars so I can provide oil to sell. Instead he says for her and her family to go live among the Philistines. If you know your bible, you might recall how David defeated this group centuries earlier. My point is they are still around and Elisha's only advice for this woman is to go live there until the famine is over.
 - iv) My point is sometimes God works miraculously. Sometimes He just wants to go do something practical and logical during a problem at hand.
 - v) Coming back to the text, the woman trusted in Elisha and she moved there for the next seven years exactly as Elisha told her to do.
- 15. Verse 3: At the end of the seven years she came back from the land of the Philistines and went to the king to beg for her house and land. ⁴ The king was talking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, and had said, "Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done." ⁵ Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land.
 - a) The story now moves forward to seven years later. In this scene we have the king of Israel, the woman returning after seven years and Gehazi, who is Elisha's servant.
 - b) Time for some more recall from previous chapters: Back in Chapter 5, Gehazi got in big trouble after Elisha cured a foreign general of leprosy. Gehazi went behind the back of Elisha to go demand payment. When Elisha found out, Gehazi got leprosy himself.
 - i) I state all of that to consider two possibilities: The first is that this story here in Chapter 8 is "backtracking". In other words, the famine was the time when all of Samaria was under siege of the Aramean army. In these verses when Gehazi is telling the king what Elisha did, it is out of time sequence of the previous chapter.
 - ii) The other possibility is God is still using Gehazi even as a leper to be a witness to the king of what God is doing through Elisha. Remember that Gehazi worked as Elisha's servant and maybe he still had a heart for God.
 - iii) Either possibility could happen and we'll have to find out one day in heaven.
 - c) Coming back to the story, we have Gehazi talking to the king and telling the king how Elisha had brought a boy back to life from the dead, then "all of a sudden" that woman does show up after the seven years are now over. She traveled to see the king because she wants to beg the king to get back her house and land she lost for seven years.
 - i) The point of course, is that God's timing is perfect. The king was interested in hearing stories about Elisha. Gehazi happens to be around in order to relate the stories to the king. The woman who has been gone for seven years just happens to show up to beg for her life back in Israel after the seven years are over. It is a nice example to teach us to trust in what God asks us to do and be willing to trust in His timing in order to make that difference for Him in this world.

16. Verse 5 (cont.): Gehazi said, "This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life." ⁶ The king asked the woman about it, and she told him. Then he assigned an official to her case and said to him, "Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now."
- a) The woman who lost her home to go live in a foreign country for the last seven years not only got her house and land back, but the king also gave her the income she would have earned from farming the land the last seven years.
 - b) From the king's standpoint, this is the son of the king who stole the farmland from a man by having him illegally killed. If I had to guess, the king was not so much impressed with the woman, but with the power God had given Elisha. This is the king saying in effect, I don't want to get on Elisha's bad side, so let me bless those that Elisha has blessed. For what it is worth, this is the king taking a step in the right direction to trust in God.
 - c) With that happy little ending to this story stated, we now move on to something else.
17. Verse 7: Elisha went to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad king of Aram was ill. When the king was told, "The man of God has come all the way up here," ⁸ he said to Hazael, "Take a gift with you and go to meet the man of God. Consult the LORD through him; ask him, 'Will I recover from this illness?' "
- a) As I thought about the last story, I kept thinking, where was Elisha when all of this was taking place? The answer is here in Verse 7. Apparently God told Elisha to travel to the city of Damascus to deal with the king of that country.
 - b) Before I talk about Elisha, let me share a few words about the city of Damascus. I believe it is the oldest continuously operating city in the world. It is part of modern day Syria. Even though it has been around almost literally forever, the prophet Isaiah (who was not born as of this chapter, but will be mentioned in a few chapters) predicts that one day this city will be destroyed. (See Isaiah 17:1) That's one of the Old Testament prophecies yet to be fulfilled and has not happened to this day.
 - c) With that overly brief history stated, Elisha traveled here, the king of that city was told of Elisha's visit. The king was sick at that time and asked this holy man if he will recover. It is interesting to consider that Damascus was not a Jewish nation. Yet that man didn't ask anyone from his own gods if he will recover, but went to a "man of God" for help.
18. Verse 9: Hazael went to meet Elisha, taking with him as a gift forty camel-loads of all the finest wares of Damascus. He went in and stood before him, and said, "Your son Ben-Hadad king of Aram has sent me to ask, 'Will I recover from this illness?' "
- a) Here in Verse 9 we get introduced to a new character named Hazel. From what we know of this man historically, he was not part of any royal family, but we'll soon find out that he'll be the next king of Damascus. This guy is the messenger sent by this king to go ask Elisha if the king will recover.
 - b) At this point, let me pause to give the big picture here of why Elisha is doing this. This has to do with an unfulfilled request that God made to Elisha's predecessor Elijah. God had told Elijah to go anoint the new kings of both the Northern Kingdom of Israel as well as the next king of Aram. (That's from 1st Kings 19:15). I state that here because I believe Elijah told Elisha of that unfulfilled duty and that's why Elisha travels to Damascus. Let me also remind us of God's long-term goal here: To end the influence of the worship of the false god "Baal" among the Israelites. Therefore, all of this is about God working to bring in new kings to rule in order to try to end the reigns of those who have lead the Israelites away from God.
 - i) OK, it's time for one of my why should we care about all of this ancient history statements: The point to remember is that those that God calls to serve Him, He cares about and does all that He can to draw us back to Him when we turn from Him. Think of it as God constantly working in our lives to keep us close to Him in all that we do in our lives. With that said, back to the story at hand.

- c) Remember that the king of Aram spent a lot of time and effort trying to defeat Israel in the previous few chapters. That's the same army that ran away in fear while surrounding and trying to starve out the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It's the same king that tried to kidnap Elisha because he knew what the king was thinking. (This is all from the last two chapters.) My point is the king of Aram has respect for Elisha as the king was aware that Elisha was behind the defeats of his kingdom. Therefore, now that this king is sick he sends camel loads of gifts to Elisha trying to bribe him while he was in the area.
 - i) All the king wanted to know here in effect is, "Will I live through this sickness?"
We get Elisha's answer in the next set of verses.
- 19. Verse 10: Elisha answered, "Go and say to him, 'You will certainly recover'; but the LORD has revealed to me that he will in fact die." ¹¹ He stared at him with a fixed gaze until Hazael felt ashamed. Then the man of God began to weep. ¹² "Why is my lord weeping?" asked Hazael. "Because I know the harm you will do to the Israelites," he answered. "You will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women."
 - a) Well, if the story wasn't strange enough so far, it just got much weirder. Let me translate all of this in simple English: Elisha said to this messenger, "Tell the king that he'll recover from this illness but not live much longer." Then Elisha started crying as God just revealed to Elisha that Hazael will lead an army against (North) Israel killing many innocent people including harming pregnant women and children.
 - b) In other words, we have Elisha laying out a prophecy that is very negative. So if this is so bad, why didn't Elisha try to kill Hazael there on the spot to stop him from doing this? To ponder another question, why did God predict such a horrible thing and not try to stop it in the first place? As far as prophecy itself, know that the bible is full of both good and bad predictions that has or will literally come true. It is one of those reminders to us of a proof of His existence, as He knows all things that happen in history, both good and bad before they happen.
 - i) As to why God allowed it happen, the best answer I can give, is this is the ultimate price society has to pay when they collectively turn from God. It's almost as if He is saying to us, "I don't want to have to go such drastic measures. I'd much rather you turn to Me now collectively so none of this has to happen."
 - ii) The other interesting thing is we don't read of the fulfillment of this prophecy in the bible. Future chapters mention Israel fighting this country, but we don't read of the details as described here. My guess is happened exactly as predicted.
 - c) OK John, this is a really sad story. What's the point in learning this history? If we say, go to church each Sunday will that prevent us from say, such horrors? When we ask God for His blessing, we are usually thinking of material blessings or possibly something related to fame or power. We rarely think of God's blessing as simply keeping us safe from harm. If we were in a lot of pain, if God loves us so much, why doesn't He just end it right then and there? That in effect is the question I am posing here.
 - i) The answer is Jesus did not come to earth to heal what we are currently suffering from or solve our problems. He came here to tell us that He and He alone paid the full price of our sins and by trusting in Him, we can be saved for eternity. As to our life here and now we are free to ask God whatever we want, but God is not obligated to solve our problems for us. Yes He can guide us and He does pull us through whatever we are dealing with. Trusting God is all about letting go of our fears of what could happen to us.
 - ii) Here's a great prayer line that applies here: Pray like we are fully dependent upon God to do something. Then live like it is up to us. What I mean by that is do what seems best in any situation as if God can't help us. At the same time trust that He's guiding us the whole time. Meanwhile back to the tragedy that is this story.

20. Verse 13: Hazael said, "How could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat?"
- Hazel's first reaction is in effect, "How could you say such a horrible thing about me? You don't even know me!" We get no reaction by Elisha here. It is as if Elisha says, "God told me this is going to happen and you will do this, so I'm just the messenger, deal with it."
 - A quick technical note before I move on. The word "dog" as translated here does not refer to a household pet. It refers to a vicious street dog. Think "wolf" if that helps.
21. Verse 13 (cont.): "The LORD has shown me that you will become king of Aram," answered Elisha.
- Elisha's only reaction to Hazael's statement is, "Oh while I'm in the neighborhood, here is what else God told me: You Hazael will be the next king of Aram."
 - You have to remember that Hazael was just a messenger of the king. Historical records found in that area say that Hazael ruled for about 40 years. Another historical record also not in the bible described Hazael as a nobody who became a king. It refers to the fact that he did not descend from any royal line.
 - I'm guessing when Hazael heard that, his first thought was, "Forget all of that other stuff I was supposed to tell the king about recovering from illness and forget that prediction that I'll slaughter Israelites. I'm going to be a king!" I say that because we read that a day after Hazael returned to the palace he murdered the king. Speaking of that tragedy:
22. Verse 14: Then Hazael left Elisha and returned to his master. When Ben-Hadad asked, "What did Elisha say to you?" Hazael replied, "He told me that you would certainly recover." ¹⁵ But the next day he took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and spread it over the king's face, so that he died. Then Hazael succeeded him as king.
- Here is the actual murder itself. Hazel took a thick cloth, soaked it in water so his victim could not breath through the cloth and then Hazel suffocated the king to death. If that sin wasn't horrible enough as it was, he also told the king a "half truth". He told the king that he would recover from his sickness as Elijah predicted. Hazel didn't mention the part how he would be the next king. Now think about the prediction Elijah made how Hazel will hurt innocent people. Once someone murders once, unfortunately it gets easier to do.
 - The other point to learn here is that God is working in the background to try to bring an end to the worship of idols amongst his people. Part of that effort was about eliminating this king of Aram who was constantly trying to defeat Israel. As to wars with Israel, we'll read of the new king Hazel attacking Israel in future chapters. In the meantime, it is time to move on with the rest of Chapter 8.
23. Verse 16: In the fifth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat began his reign as king of Judah. ¹⁷ He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. ¹⁸ He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD.
- Know that this text is describing what is happening in the Southern Kingdom of Israel. That is called the kingdom of Judah. I'll use "Judah" for the rest of the lesson. The text of Kings has not said anything about Judah since 1st Kings Chapter 18, if I remember it right.
 - To put this another way, the focus of the chapters since that time has mostly been on the role of God's prophets and their messages to kings and individuals both in the Northern Kingdom of Israel as well as to non-Israelites. However, this two-volume book of "Kings" is called "Kings" for a reason. The big picture is to show us how Israel went from the height of power under David and Solomon to a point where this nation will be conquered and scattered by the end of the book. In other words, while there are some happy moments in this story, the big picture is Kings is a tragedy. The main point to learn from the book as a whole is about what can happen to our lives when we make the decision to turn away from the desire to have God rule over our lives.
 - With that depressing thought stated, it is time to get back to the text.

- b) One thing I emphasized when I started Kings is don't panic about trying to remember all of these king's names and keeping them straight. I've been studying my bible for many years and I still get mixed up who is who. With that said, here is what you do need to know about the latest king of Judah: He (Jehoram) only reigned eight years, he married a daughter of a wicked king of Israel (Northern Kingdom) and he did not please God based on how he lived his life.
 - i) OK, so this latest king is another "bad egg" to steal a phrase that I've used some time back to describe the kings who turned from God. Why should I care about any of this ancient history? First, it is not to learn about the history of Israel. It is to teach us lessons about how God wants us to live out our lives in obedience to Him and trusting Him to guide our lives.
 - ii) One of the principals taught in the New Testament is about the importance of not marrying non-believers or even going into business partnerships with them. This is based on 2nd Corinthians 6:14. To quote the late J. Vernon McGee, "When you partner with a nonbeliever, you get the devil as a father in law."
 - iii) I state all of this here because the queen here was the daughter of Jezebel, a former queen of the Northern Kingdom that required the worship of Baal for Israelites.
 - iv) If you think I'm reading too much into the text, notice the last line that says, "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD." Bottom line here is we have another "bad egg" and he doesn't reign very long because he turned from God with his life.
 - c) Before I move on, let me address the issue of two people marrying (or even being business partners) and after that relationship began, one becomes a strong Christian. I know that such situations happen but they are difficult to live with. In the New Testament, Paul did teach that the marriage should not break up because the believer can now be a witness to the nonbeliever. (See 1st Corinthians 7:13-14). Paul then said that if the non-believing one chooses to leave because of one's faith we are to accept it and move on.
 - i) For my single readers, beware of what is called evangelical dating. That term is about believers who try to convert their non-believing boyfriends or girlfriends. One can save a lot of hours of future counseling grief if one accepts the idea that one should not partner in that type of relationship.
 - ii) OK enough of that. Back to the story of the moment.
24. Verse 19: Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever.
- a) The point here is simply that God made an unconditional promise to King David about two hundred years earlier that he would have descendants ruling over Judah until the time when the Messiah comes.
 - i) This leads to another question. If you know your history, a few hundred years after this time, God said in effect, "I've had enough rebellion against me. Judah will go into captivity due to their rebellion." Israel was not an independent nation again literally until 1948. My point is if God promised to keep the nation of Judah alive until the Messiah came, why did this kingdom die out before Jesus?
 - ii) The way to understand that is that God allowed kings to rule over Judah for many centuries before God said in effect, "I've had enough of this rebellion." If you read this promise carefully, the idea is not that David will have "kings" forever, it is that he'll have descendants until the Messiah comes on the scene.
 - iii) To put it another way, there were historical records that prove that Jesus was a direct descendant of David from both his mother and his father. About 40 years after the time of Jesus, the temple where those records were stored was destroyed by the Romans. Therefore, no one living today can claim they are a descendant of David as those records no longer exist. My point here is just that God promised David lots of kings as descendants, but that end did not come here.

25. Verse 20: In the time of Jehoram, Edom rebelled against Judah and set up its own king.²¹ So Jehoram went to Zair with all his chariots. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but he rose up and broke through by night; his army, however, fled back home.
²²To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah. Libnah revolted at the same time.
- a) If there is one big theme I have been emphasizing throughout this study of kings, is that there is a big price to be paid from the decision to turn from God with one's life. In this case, the current king of Judah turned from God and now some of the traditional enemies of that nation rebelled against them.
 - b) Time for some quick history. Edom is directly east of Israel. This is one of the nations that David conquered as a king. Back in Chapter 3 of Second Kings, we read of the king of Judah and the king of Israel defeating the Edomites. Now here we are, one generation later, with new kings in charge, and the Edomites are rebelling again. The point here is that for God's people (that's you and me) to be successful in life and not have our enemies rule over us is all about trusting God to guide our lives and not let the consequences play out from turning from Him.
 - i) But John, didn't you just lecture us that God came to earth to save us from sin and not to cure our ills? Yes I did. At the same time, God does want to guide our lives for His glory. He allows us to go through difficult times to keep us close to Him and trust Him through our difficulties.
 - ii) In effect that is what we are reading here. With the rebellion of the Edomites and a place called Libnah, we are reading of God allowing bad stuff to happen in order for the king and the Israelites to turn to God to say, help!
 - iii) However, all the text says about this king that we need to know is that line that read "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD." (Verse 18). All we are reading here is the consequences that occur when one does turn from God with one's life.
 - iv) On that tragic note it is time to read on.
26. Verse 23: As for the other events of Jehoram's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?²⁴ Jehoram rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. And Ahaziah his son succeeded him as king.
- a) The point here is if one was interested in what else this king did during the eight years that he reigned as king, they had records that were kept in the temple. Those records survived through the Babylonian captivity and weren't fully destroyed until the time of the Romans many centuries later.
 - b) Bottom line: Bad egg. Time to describe the next king of Judah.
27. Verse 25: In the twelfth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign.²⁶ Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri king of Israel.
²⁷ He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab and did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was related by marriage to Ahab's family.
- a) I'll make this very simple, the next king was another bad egg. In effect that's all you need to know about this guy. The longer version is that he also married a princess from the Northern Kingdom of Israel, who was another bad egg. This king only reigned one year as if God is saying, "You should have learned from your dad. Time's up kid!"
28. Verse 28: Ahaziah went with Joram son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth Gilead. The Arameans wounded Joram;²⁹ so King Joram returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramoth in his battle with Hazael king of Aram.
- a) The final comment of this chapter is simply that during the one year he was king, he and the king of Israel fought against Hazael, the man who became king of Aram. The king of Israel was named Joram. He was wounded in the battle with Hazel. To state the obvious this story will continue in the next chapter. I also need to warn us that the tragic aspect of this text also continues in the next chapter.

29. As I wrap up this lesson, I want to address the question of why does God allow tragedies to occur in the first place. Years ago I heard a great illustration to help with this question: Suppose that every time someone is about to murder someone, an angel steps in and stops the fight. Well, let's now add attacks. Suppose an angel stepped in to prevent every act of violence. You could even take this one step further and say, "why don't angels stop lying from occurring?" The point here is that pretty soon people would be complaining, "Hey God, You won't let me do anything. You don't trust me or us to do anything as angels are constantly stepping in the way to stop actions."
- a) My point here is that in order to allow free will, God has to allow tragedies to occur. That is one reason why God can state the future before it happens like it did in this lesson. It is also the reason that He doesn't stop bad things from happening in order to allow free will to exist in the world. However, God wants us to trust Him through the difficult times of our lives, so that He can be honored by how we pull through. That is the key point of this lesson. Like I said, pray like we are dependant upon God for everything and live like He is not going to do anything. Then and only then can we watch our lives unfold and watch Him work in our lives. That way He and He alone gets the glory as we deal with our own tragedies that occur in our lives.
- b) On that sad but positive note, I'll wrap this lesson in my closing prayer.
30. Father, there are moments in our lives when we are at wits' end and we don't know what to do next. Help us when those times come, to continue to trust You, that You have a plan and more importantly, You want to guide our lives for our glory. Give us the strength to go forward when we hit those "I can't take it anymore moments" and trust You through such times. We only have one life here to live, and help us to use our time to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.