

## 2 Kings 8: Biblical Reading and Reflections

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 17 October 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     2 Kings chapter 8. Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, Arise and depart with your household, and sojourn wherever you can, for the Lord has called for a famine, and it will come upon the land for seven years. So the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God. She went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. And at the end of the seven years, when the woman returned from the land of the Philistines, she went to appeal to the king for her house and her land. Now the king was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done.

And while he was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, here is the woman, and here is her son whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed an official for her, saying, Restore all that was hers, together with all the produce of the fields from the day that she left the land until now.

Now Elisha came to Damascus. Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, was sick. And when it was told him, The man of God has come here, the king said to Hazei, Take a present with you, and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord through him, saying, Shall I recover from this sickness?

So Hazei went to meet him, and took a present with him, all kinds of goods of Damascus, forty camels loads. When he came and stood before him, he said, Your son Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, has sent me to you, saying, Shall I recover from this sickness? And Elisha said to him, Go say to him, You shall certainly recover. But the Lord has shown me that he shall certainly die. And he fixed his gaze and stared at him until he was embarrassed. And the man of God wept. And Hazei said, Why does my Lord weep? He answered, Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel.

You will set on fire their fortresses, and you will kill their young men with the sword, and dash in pieces their little ones, and rip open their pregnant women. And Hazei said, What is your servant, who is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?

[ 2 : 1 5 ]     Elisha answered, The Lord has shown me that you are to be king over Syria. Then he departed from Elisha and came to his master, who said to him, What did Elisha say to you? And he answered, He told me that you would certainly recover. But the next day he took the bedcloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it over his face till he died. And Hazei became king in his place.

In the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, began to reign. He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done. For the daughter of Ahab was his wife, and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Yet the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David his servant, since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever. In his days, Edom revolted from the rule of Judah, and set up a king of their own. Then Joram passed over to Zahir with all his chariots, and rose by night. And he and his chariot commander struck the Edomites who had surrounded him, but his army fled home. So Edom revolted from the rule of Judah to this day.

Then Libna revolted at the same time. Now the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David.

And Ahaziah his son reigned in his place. In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah, began to reign. Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah.

She was a granddaughter of Amri, king of Israel. He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab. He went with Joram the son of Ahab to make war against Haziel king of Syria at Ramoth-Gilead, and the Syrians wounded Joram. And king Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Haziel king of Syria.

[ 4 : 31 ] And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick. Chapter 6 of the book of 2 Kings ended with a woman seeking help from the king in a time of famine, and the king was powerless to help. Chapter 8 begins with the king now able to assist a woman after a famine, on account of the memory of the prophet Elisha.

The famine mentioned here seems to be the same one as afflicted Samaria in chapters 6 and 7. Elisha had provided forewarning about the famine in a way that extended the deliverance of the Lord to others. There are possible connections here with the story of the Exodus, going into another country as a result of a seven-year famine. In Genesis chapter 10, the Philistines are associated with the Egyptians, and then the woman returns to find that her land is lost, before it is later restored to her. These early verses of the chapter involve a surprising scene. Two of the characters that have been previously mentioned in the story, who are very negatively portrayed, Gehazi and King Jehoram, are reflecting upon Elisha's works in his absence, telling the great deeds that the Lord has accomplished through him. As Gehazi is telling the story of the raising of the woman's child, lo and behold, the woman comes to ask for the restoration of her land, the land that she lost when she left the country.

The recounting of the story of the woman is left off, as her story continues in the land being restored to her by the king. The return to the land and the land being restored is a sort of jubilee.

It's like the original entrance into the land, where with the sevenfold circuit of Jericho on the seventh day, the land is restored with the blowing of trumpets. It looks back, but Peter Lightheart notes that it also possibly looks forward to the exile. Israel leaving the land and dwelling among the nations for a period of time could be restored to the land if the memory of the prophet is preserved.

King Jehoram, presuming it is him, seems to have a rather different attitude after the events of Samaria. He's far more positively inclined to Elisha. We should also note that the king's restoration of the woman's lost land is parallel to Elisha's restoration of her lost child.

[ 6 : 40 ] Remembering and meditating on the deeds of the prophet inspires to appropriate and analogous action in the present, and it might make us think of an implicit promise to Israel that their seed will be raised from the dead of exile and their lost land will be restored to them. We've seen negative images of Israel and Judah in the cannibalistic mothers of chapter 6, and now we have a possible positive image of how faithful to the word of the prophet they might know restoration and deliverance.

In 1 Kings chapter 19 verses 15 to 17, the Lord said to Elijah, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you arrive you shall anoint Hazei to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place, and the one who escapes from the sword of Hazei shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Immediately after this Elijah had gone on to anoint Elisha, but the reader of the text will have been surprised to note that neither Hazei nor Jehu are anointed by Elijah. Those anointings don't actually occur until chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Kings. To understand this we should think about the ministry of Elijah and Elisha as a two-part ministry. There is a connection between the two. Elisha continues the ministry of Elijah by the double portion of his spirit. The two ministries are a two-part ministry.

Elijah's ministry is a ministry of the wilderness, followed by the ministry of Elisha which is a ministry of the land. Elisha will be the one who completes the commissioned task of Elijah. He is the one that will have to anoint these two men. We may be surprised to encounter judgment here, just as there seems to be an apparent thawing in Jehoram's attitude towards Elisha. He's asking about the works of Elisha from Gehazi and he has just performed an act of kingly justice in restoring the Shunammite's land to her. Nevertheless, Jehoram, while his evil is less than that of Ahab his father, is still an evil king and the death sentence hanging over the Amari dynasty will fall upon him and his kingdom. He never truly repents. We see here that the reputation of the prophet has extended beyond the land of Israel. Elisha was involved in the healing of Naaman in chapter 5 and also in the sparing of the Syrian army in chapter 6 verses 8 to 23. Israel was called to be a light to the nations and the nations are now coming to Israel to learn from the Lord, more specifically from Elisha the man of God.

While the role of the prophets to this point has largely been confined to Israel and Judah, now we're seeing the role of the prophets bringing God's word out and extending Israel's influence to the surrounding nations and empires. Israel will later be scattered throughout the world, not just as a punishment but a means of spreading that light of God's truth to other peoples. God's word is going international. John the Baptist had wondered whether Jesus was the one expected or whether to wait for another. He had heard about the mighty works of Christ, the way that he healed the sick, about his casting out of demons and about the way that he was teaching the poor. However, he had prophesied that the one coming after him would bring judgment, that he would come with fire, that he would purge the threshing floor and that the axe was laid to the root of the trees. And then Jesus comes along and he brings healing and life. We can understand John the Baptist scratching his head and wondering whether this was indeed the one that he had foretold. One could imagine Elijah having the same feeling about Elisha. When he met with the Lord at Horeb, he had received this great message of judgment, that God was going to judge the people and that he was going to do so through Hazei,

Jehu and Elisha. And then Elisha comes on the scene and nothing happens. Well, not judgment anyway. He raises the dead. He delivers people from debt. He miraculously multiplies food. He provides deliverance from famine. He heals a foreign leper. All of these things are great, but they don't fulfill what we've been waiting for since chapter 19 of 1 Kings. We started the book of 2 Kings with fire coming down from heaven, but since then we've not seen an awful lot of judgment. Why is this the case and how can reflecting upon the story of John the Baptist and Jesus help us to understand it?

[10:57] I think in the case of Jesus, as in the case of Elisha, the deliverer brings life and gathers a remnant community first and then judgment falls. Elisha has been forming a community, a community of the sons of the prophets that surrounds him, and with them a wider body of people who believe in the word of the Lord. When judgment comes, these people will be preserved through it as the true remnant of Israel. Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, wants to know whether he will recover from his sickness, and he sends Hazeiel with an enormous gift. Elisha, however, gives him an ambiguous word, and there are various ways to understand this. There could perhaps be an ambiguity in the statement that Elisha gives to Hazeiel to deliver to the king. The statement could be read in two different ways.

By one way of reading it, Ben-Hadad would not live, and by another he would. And then Elisha clears up the confusion and the ambiguity by explicitly and forthrightly foretelling what will occur, leaving Hazeiel himself to determine how to deliver the message. Alternatively, the message itself could be a clear statement that he will live, followed by a statement that he will not live. Elsewhere, in places like 1 Kings chapter 22, we see such contradictory words from the Lord, ways in which he deceives people to their doom. Whichever it is, Hazeiel is going to become king in Ben-Hadad's place. And Hazeiel does not just deliver the message, he actually fulfills the prophecy by killing the king Ben-Hadad. And by the fact that the prophecy is delivered to Hazeiel himself, the prophecy provokes the actions by which it will be fulfilled. The chapter concludes by turning our gaze towards the southern kingdom of Judah. However, at this time, the northern kingdom of Israel in its rebellion is clearly setting the terms for both of the kingdoms. There's been a close convergence of the two nations. Jehoshaphat had been unwise in fighting with Israel on two different occasions. In chapter 22 of 1 Kings, he had narrowly escaped with his life. In chapter 3 of 2 Kings, he had also been part of a losing battle fighting alongside Israel. While Jehoshaphat was a good king, he ends up bringing Judah into a very damaging alliance with the northern kingdom of Israel.

His son marries the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah. And shockingly, we read that he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He may be a king of Judah, he may be a son of David, but the pattern for both northern and southern kingdom is provided by the sinful Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and all of his successors. While he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, the Lord preserved a testimony within the south, preserving the house of David so that David would not be wiped out. Just as the northern kingdom had lost Moab, so the kingdom of Judah loses Edom. Libna also revolts at the same time.

The land is being chipped away. After Jehoram dies, he is succeeded by his son Ahaziah. Once again, he walks in the ways of the kings of Israel, his mother being Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, and the granddaughter of Amri. We might also note that the names of the two sons of Ahab who reign are Ahaziah and Jehoram. And now we've had a Jehoram and an Ahaziah on the southern throne.

The nations are starting to mirror each other. A question to consider. At the end of the chapter, Ahaziah joins Jehoram of the northern kingdom to fight at Ramoth-Gilead against the Syrians with Hazeiel. Jehoram is wounded and he returns to Jezreel to be healed. How might reading this event in the light of chapters 21 and 22 of 1 Kings help us to understand its significance?