

Four Types of Hearts **2 Kings 6:8-8:15**

In the following section of Kings, we find some fascinating, tragic, and somewhat comedic stories. You were probably not told about these stories in Sunday School! And I doubt no one ever used the Flannelgraph to teach you about people eating donkeys' heads and each other's children. If you are the skeptical sort who thinks, "You Christians only pick and choose between the good stories and verses... If you really believe that the Bible is God's word, then why don't you teach on the stories about cannibalism, or what about that story of Joram's assistant being killed viciously because he didn't believe? What about Jehu's bloody purge [next chapter]? Why don't you teach on these bloodthirsty Bible stories too?" Good questions. Welcome to the book of Kings. I am glad you are interested enough to point out some objections, and to know such stories.

Many of the stories in Scripture are difficult to understand and stomach, but that does not mean we need to avoid them, or that we cannot make sense of them. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable (2 Tim 3:16), and even these puzzling stories are for our good. We simply need to try to understand them.

What exactly are we looking for? First, we see Elisha humiliating the Syrian raiders with superior wisdom, blindness, and kindness. Then, we find an awful famine that was so severe that people were eating children in desperation. Next, read of Elisha predicting the end of a famine and the death of an assassin. Within this story, is an encouraging story of how God used four lepers to tell the good news of deliverance to famished Israel. After this story, the context shifts from national events to a story of God's faithfulness to the same Shunammite woman that we have read about previously. Finally, the overarching story of Kings is carried on at the end of our 2 Kings 8. We read the story of Hazael rising to power by killing the Syrian king. We witness the decline of Judah, and feel the coming end of Ahab's house.

How might we tie all these stories together? One of the main questions we should ask in studying a passage of Scripture is, "What does this passage teach me about God?" "What is God doing in this passage?" God is doing the following: protecting his people (8:23); extending mercy to the Syrians (8:20-23); speaking his word, which involves predicting and controlling the future, and interpreting the events of history (7:1, 16-17; 8:10, 13); using the unclean and unnamed people to declare his salvation (7:3-10); defending the needy (8:1-6); and executing justice (8:7-15).

Another question to ask is “What does this passage teach me about humanity?” Here is where we can really sink in to some personal application. In this particular section of Scripture, we have examples of people responding differently to God’s revelation. God reveals himself in word and deed in the ways noted above, yet not everyone responds in repentance and faith in Yahweh. Three individuals illustrate *unbelieving hearts*: the Syrian king (6:8-24), Israel’s king (6:25-33), and the Israelite messenger/captain/assassin/officer (7:1-20). We have one example of *belief* in the Shunammite woman (8:1-6). She responds to God’s grace and his word with a soft, obedient heart. We might also include the four lepers as a positive example as well.

Let us look at the four types of hearts displayed in these people. As we look at this them, we need to remember that we are called to respond to God appropriately while we can. The day of grace will one day be replaced with the day of judgment.

#1: The Rebellion of a Stubborn Heart (6:8-24)

We begin reading that “the king Syria was warring with Israel” (8). God displayed his grace to the Syrians in several ways, yet we do not read that the Syrian (or Aram) king responded with faith in Yahweh. Instead they are warring with Israel again. Debate exists about who was king of Syria at this time (and there is debate about the chronology of this section). No name is given in 6:8, but his name is Ben-hadad in in verse 24. Is this the same Ben-Hadad? It is possible, but it may also be Ben-Hadad II. In either case, the point remains. The Syrian king (or kings) had witnessed Gods’ grace, yet they refused to respond with repentance and faith in God.

How exactly did God extend grace to the king and the Syrians? First, *God blessed them with **success***. Notice what the writer says in chapter 5, “Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria” (5:1). Did you catch that? God gave them victory! This is an amazing statement of monotheism. Another nation, who worshiped other gods, is given victory – not by the power of their gods – but by power of Yahweh. God is not a small god, who influences only one group of people. He rules the church, and the cosmos. Perhaps the writer has 1 Kings 22 in mind specifically, when Syria defeated Ahab and Israel. But he may have more is in mind as well. The point is that God had blessed them with gifts and victories.

Sadly, many are blessed by God, but refuse to acknowledge him as Lord and God. Every gift and success that a person has comes from the hand of God, maker of heaven and earth. In response to God’s revealing grace, Paul says that people sinfully exchange the glory of the Creator for the created things. Because they suppress the truth revealed to them, they are without excuse (Rom 1:18-25).

Second, *God blessed them with **salvation***. In chapter 5, we read of the incredible healing of Naaman, the Syrian commander. Naaman makes the great confession of faith, "I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (5:15). He believed. He was humbled under the mighty hand of God. His story demonstrates that God saves people from every tribe and tongue if they will believe. The Naaman story reminds us that the gospel humbles us; the gospel is simple; the gospel is exclusive; and the gospel is global. Anyone who will humble himself or herself and trust in Christ alone may be saved.

But despite seeing Naaman's obvious transformation, we do not read about the king of Syria seeking Yahweh for himself. Perhaps the reason they are at war now is because of Naaman's transformation. Were they provoked to anger by his testimony? We do not read of Naaman again. Maybe he was killed. I imagine he was at least removed as commander.

Third, *God blessed them by **crushing their pride***. In 6:8-23, we find three humiliating acts that should have made the king and the Syrians recognize the supremacy of God, and bow to God. But that is not what we find in the story. After these three humiliating acts, we read in verse 24, that Ben-Hadad besieged Samaria. The war intensified. He never trusts in God, but rebels against God because his heart is stony. We then read of his sad death in chapter 7. God graciously humbled this king in various ways; he dealt with him, but the king hardens his heart against him.

Do you know that God humiliates people in order that they may respond to him in faith? Jesus humbled the disciples when he told them to cast their net on the other side for a catch (Luke 5). Peter responded in awe saying, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man" (5:8). When he calmed the storm, the disciples said, "Who then is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). God humbles us that he might save us, and use us for his glory. However, some respond negatively. The Syrian king goes the way of Pharaoh and Judas instead of the way of Naaman.

How did God humble the Syrian king? God humbled the king first by ***frustrating his plans***. In verses 8-14, we read of the humorous ordeal of Elisha telling the king of Israel the plans of the Syrian's king. (Notice the grace extended to Israel's king). The Syrian king would make his plans (8), but then somehow Israel would find out about it and avoid defeat (10). The writer says this happened more than once (10b). The Syrian king thinks he has a leak in his administration. He asks, "Will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel?" (11). His aide tells him that he does not have a traitor on his team; instead, it is Elisha, who "tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom" (12). He was the proverbial "fly on the wall." From many miles away, God

granted Elisha the secret counsels of the Syrian king, and in so doing, was protecting the people of God. The Psalmist said it well, “The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples” (Ps 33:10; cf., Ps 44:21).

In this frustration, we see that God is dealing with this foreign king. Would this have shaken you? How would you have responded? Instead of seeking Elisha to learn more, the king grows angry. He says, “Go see where he is, that I may seize him” (13). His servants obey. They go to Dothan, where Elisha was located, and then surround the city at night in order to capture the prophet (14). One wonders why he did not assume that Elisha would know of this plan also! Is pride not the reason for this action also?

Next, *God humbles the king by **protecting his prophet and humiliating the Syrians***. Notice how God protects his people. The writer tells us that the Syrian army frightens Elisha’s assistant the next morning. He cries out, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” (15). Elisha says, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (16). Elisha sees what the assistant cannot see. I imagine the assistant trying to do the logic on this one! To quote Gary Coleman (aka, “Arnold”), “Whatchu talkin bout Willis?” He must have thought, “Just how do we have more soldiers than that massive army?” Elisha then prays, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” God opened the eyes of the lad and he saw “horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (17). The servant now sees and embraces the reality of God’s unseen protection.

God is the God who opens eyes for people to see his grace (cf., Ps 146:8). He is also the God who gives *unseen protection* to his people (cf., Ps 91:9-11). Though Jesus did not use God’s unseen protection in Gethsemane, he was aware of it. He rebuked Peter saying, “Or do you think I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legion of angels?” (Matt 26:53). There were 72,000 spirits ready to fight on his behalf, but they did not act because the cross was the will of God. Jesus knew and lived under the unseen protection of 2 Kings 6:8-23 (Davis, 115).

God is a refuge for his people. He delivers his people (Ps 107; 50:15). Elisha tells his servant, “Do not fear.” We need to hear this. God protects his people. We can say with the Psalmists:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?... Though an army encamp against

me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.” (Ps 27:1, 3)

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust” (Ps 91:1-2)

As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore (Ps 125:2)

Indeed, Christian history is filled with stories of God delivering his servants in remarkable ways. It is not always his will to do protect us in this life, for the blood of martyrs remind us of this fact. But God is always with and for his people. Because of this truth, we can live in peace, not in fear. Are you living in fear because of finances, illness, or relocating? Find refuge in God’s promises and his presence.

Next we read of how *God humiliated the Syrians*. Elisha prays next for God to deal with the enemy’s sight. He says, “Please strike this people with blindness” (18, probably not total absence of sight, but visual confusion, ala Gen 19:11). God strikes them with blindness according to Elisha’s prayer (18b). Then Elisha tells the enemy, “This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek. And he led them to Samaria” (19). Elisha assures them that they will find the person that they are looking for (which is himself!). Then he takes them on a ten-mile hike to Samaria.

Elisha prays again in verse 20. He prays this time for Yahweh to open their eyes once they all reach Samaria. And the Lord does so. But when the king of Israel (still King Jehoram it seems) sees him, he is ready to attack the Syrian king (21). But instead of a striking them down, Elisha instructs the king to sit them down, and feed them and then send them home! (22). He illustrates Romans 12:18-21 and Mat 5:43-45. So they prepared a “great feast” for their enemies (23). They did not kill them with the sword, but with kindness.

What an embarrassment this must have been to the king! One can only imagine what Syria’s king thought when they returned. “Did you slay Elisha?” They would have to answer, “No, they fed us dumplings! And we still have left pecan pie in our pockets.”

God was slaying the pride of Ben-hadad. He was showing him of the folly of opposing the real King of all the earth. Psalm 2 captures this idea. God laughs at the earthly kings who make plots against him (1-4). The Psalmist goes on to urge the

reader to “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps 2:11-12). One can either bow the knee to Jesus, or serve the true and living God, or they will “perish the way.”

Finally, God humbles him by *extending mercy to him*. In this humiliation, there is also hope. What kind of God would treat his enemies like this? Only Yahweh. The God who protected Elisha and his servant and Israel, would have protected Syria also, if they had sought refuge in him. The shelter of God is available to all who will turn to Christ. As Davis says, one could sing the Hart’s old hymn like this, “Come ye, Syrians, poor and wretched, weak and wounded, sick and sore. Jesus, ready, stands to save you; Full of pity, joined with power. He is able, He is able; He is willing; doubt no more.”

God gave Ben-hadad these living examples of his supremacy, power, and transforming grace. But despite the military victories, Naaman’s transformation, and these humiliations, the king did not bow the knee to Yahweh.

How have you responded to God’s gracious revelation of himself? How does God humble us today? He gives us his word (Isa 66:2). He reveals his glory in creation. Look at a little baby or a majestic sunset over the ocean. Does that not move you? He also changes peoples lives that we used to know were chasing the things of this world. This should make us glorify God (cf., Gal 1:23). Additionally, sometimes we are humbled under the weight of a crisis, a crisis that should make us cry out to God – perhaps death, or illness, a calamity, or a crisis of discovering life is meaningless apart from God. Sometimes it is the consequences of living in ongoing sin that humbles people, which leads them to bow to in repentance (Ps 107:12). Finally, God may also use the kindness of other Christians to humble the unbeliever. These are all acts of grace intended to move us to faith. Do not sin away the day of grace, respond to God while you can.

#2: The Impatience of a Superficial Heart (6:25-33)

The next type of heart is illustrated in the life of Jehoram. As we analyze his life, we learn to beware of the impatience of a superficial heart. (HT: Sinclair Ferguson for the idea of these headings).

Famine (24-29). The context of the story involves war and famine (24-26), which probably is the result of Israel’s unfaithfulness. Syria had raided Israel (5:2), and sought to capture Elisha in 6:8-23, but now things escalate. They execute a full-invasion on Israel. Because their siege on Israel lasted for an extended period of time, the conditions were terrible in Israel. We read of a famine that reminds us of what we may see on the news, or what we may have personally observed in some impoverished

countries. The poor are poorer and the rich are reduced to emptiness. It was so bad that people were selling a donkey's heads and a dove's dung (pigeon manure) for ridiculously high prices (25). We can only imagine the awful situation. People are eating donkey garbage and using dung as either fuel, or possibly food. But this seems to be what the rich are reduced to eating. The poor are so driven to desperation that some are eating human beings (28).

In this fallen world, such awful things happen. This story reminds me of the Great Famine in 1932-33 in Ukraine. It too was a man-made famine. Stalin removed food by military force. An estimated 3 million plus people died as a result. Ukrainians called this *Holodomor* ("murder by hunger"). Some report how babies were eaten alive during the famine, and sometimes children would just disappear, but villagers knew what was happening (Eswine, 32).

In the midst of this sorry physical plight, the writer gives one story of a lady crying out to the king to administer justice illustrating the sorry moral plight. Like the story in 1 Kings 3, this story involves two ladies and two children and the death of a child. Jehoram throws a shot at Yahweh saying, "If the LORD will not help you, how shall I help you? From the threshing floor or the winepress?" (27). He was saying (sarcastically) that he could do nothing since the normal food supply was exhausted (grain and wine), for that was God's job not his. Nevertheless, he asks them, "What is the trouble?" (28). One of the ladies responds that they had agreed to consume each other's sons. They would eat one (already dead?) child one day, and eat the other son the next day. However, after eating the first son, the mother of the other son was accused of not keeping her agreement. She is accused of hiding her son (29). Other ancient documents report that similar situations like this occurred during a siege (Source). Elsewhere in Scripture, we read of instances of cannibalism stemming from a long siege (e.g., Lam 2:20; 4:10; Ezek 5:10). This particular story is not only pitiful physically, but it is also pitiful morally. Notice that the issue is not with eating a child, but in the failure to keep an agreement.

Unfortunately, Israel had not had a wise king to administer justice in a long time. Solomon demonstrated kingly wisdom in 1 Kings 3:16-28, as he sorted out a dispute between two ladies. Jehoram was no such king.

False Repentance (30-33). In response, the king is distressed. He apparently renders no verdict. In anguish, he tears his clothes. When he did, everyone saw that he was wearing sackcloth underneath. This was a symbol of repentance (30). His father Ahab wore sackcloth in "repentance" previously (cf. 1 Kings 21:27). Elisha may have called him to repentance. Yahweh told Israel that they would experience such curses if they were unfaithful to him (cf., Lev 26:27-29; Deut 28:52-57; Lam 2:20; 4:10). Thus, we are reading a story of divine judgment here. Thus, it was right for the king to be repenting. However, Jehoram does not have a real heart for repentance. As we read

next, he does not patiently trust in and wait on God for deliverance. He acts like his mother, seeking to kill the prophet. He may have sackcloth on the outside, but that does not make up for his unrepentant heart.

His impatience is greatly revealed in the next scene. The writer tells us that God gave Elisha wisdom to know that the Jehoram wanted to kill him. Before Jehoram's assassin (or captain, 7:2) arrived, Elisha already told the elders about the king's plan and told them to block him. Elisha says to the elders, "Do you see how this murder has come to take off my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold the door fast against him. Is it not the master's feet behind him?" (32). The captain says, "This trouble is from the LORD! *Why should I wait any longer?*" (33, my emphasis). The unrepentant, impatient, superficial heart of Jehoram is exposed. Why wait on the Lord? Why trust in the Lord? Why seek him any longer? He is turning from his only source of help.

He embraced a utilitarian view of religion. "I tried it – for a little while – but it didn't work." He thinks that politics will solve this problem instead. But how wrong he is (Ps 146:3-4). He does not demonstrate the heart of a believer. This is the heart of a believer: "Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame" (Ps 25:3). "I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry" (Ps 40:1). "Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, *till* he has mercy on us" (Psalm 123:2, my emphasis). This song of Ascent beautifully captures the soft, repentant heart of a believer:

[130:1] Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

[2] O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

[3] If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

[4] But with you there is forgiveness,

that you may be feared.

[5] I *wait for the LORD, my soul waits,*

and in his word I hope;

[6] *my soul waits for the Lord*

more than watchmen for the morning,

more than watchmen for the morning.

[7] O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
[8] And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.
(Psalm 130 ESV, my emphasis)

This is a soft, repentant heart – crying for forgiveness; waiting on God; hoping in God. My friend, beware of a superficial heart. Beware of having an outward show of religion, but not having a true repentant, worshiping heart on the inside. Jesus called out the Pharisees for such masquerades, “So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt 23:28).

Have you felt that God has been working too slowly recently? Have you been tempted to doubt God’s word because you have not seen him remove a particular problem? Keep seeking him and his word, and wait on him.

#3: The Cynicism of a Skeptical Heart (7:1-20)

Deliverance Promised (7:1-2). Now we turn to our third illustration of how *not* to respond to God. Jehoram and his assassin illustrate an unbelieving, skeptical heart. Astonishingly, Elisha actually proclaims good news of deliverance to the king. He says, “Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the LORD, Tomorrow about this time, a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria” (7:1). God promises some relief in twenty-four hours. Things would slowly improve. A seah of flour is about seven and a half quarts, which would still cost about one month’s wage. That was still outrageous. But relative financial and food relief was promised. Barley instead of dove’s dung is an improvement.

In response to the good news, the captain sarcastically says, “If the LORD himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?” (2a). His cynicism expresses his skeptical, unbelieving heart. He wonders where will this abundance of food come from? It would take an Exodus-like miracle. In his skepticism, he mocks the prophet, which is to mock the LORD himself (cf., 2 Kings 2:23-25). Elisha tells the mocker, “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it” (2b). This is a word of judgment. The people will eat, but this unbelieving captain will not taste of it, for he will be killed. What this skeptic cannot fathom is exactly what God does. This is vintage Yahweh.

We often fail to believe predictions. My family just returned from the Outer Banks. Many years ago, before OBX was developed, someone told Kimberly's grandma that she should purchase some land there. She responded, "Why would I want to pay \$500 for a bucket of sand!" Kimberly's dad says, "She wasn't a woman of great vision."

Of course this prediction was much more important, and it was coming from a more reliable source. Elijah was God's representative. He had a perfect track record. But the cynical, skeptic is never satisfied.

What kind of faith does God require? He does not tell us to believe just anything. He tells us *to believe his promises*. We are to believe promises like these: "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 10:25-26); "He who looks to the Son has life" (1 John 5:12); "No one will snatch [my sheep] out of my hand" (John 10:28) "I will raise [believers] up on the last day" (6:40); "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13); "For there is therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). God calls us to believe what he says, even though it may sound unlikely at times. But remember, God has a flawless record of faithfulness. Not one word has ever failed! The Psalmist said, "This God, his way is perfect, the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for those who take refuge in him" (Ps 18:30).

Deliverance Provided (7:3-8). How would God deliver his people? The following story tells us. Four lepers are sitting at the entrance of the gate, unable to enter because of their condition (cf., Lev 13:45-46). These unnamed lepers use some logic. They realize that if they enter the city, then they will face death or famine. If they remain outside the gate, they will also die. If they head to the Syrians, they will probably be executed, but they may find refuge. The only glimmer of hope was found in deserting to the Syrians. That is the decision they make (1-5a).

But when they get there, they find no Syrians! Notice how this happens. We read that the lepers "arose at *twilight*" to the Syrian camp (5a), but the Lord made the Syrians hear the sound of a great army (6), so that they "fled away in the *twilight*" (7, my emphasis). Who is responsible for this mighty deliverance? God himself. Salvation involves receiving what God has done. "Some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God" (Ps 20:7).

Deliverance Proclaimed (7:9-10). As a result, the lepers find a treasure trove full of food, silver and gold and clothing (8). Tent after tent, they find treasures. But then

the lepers have a moral crisis. Their conscious provokes them as they say, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household" (9). Does this not sound like a missionary text? How can we keep the good news to ourselves? Evangelism has been described as one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. That is the picture here. Off the finders of food go to the gatekeepers of the city and report the good news (10). People who know of God's deliverance should proclaim it! (cf., Ps 40:9-10).

When the report is told to the king, he does not believe. He thinks it is a trap (11-12). Though Elisha promised deliverance, and though Elisha had never failed in his predictions, Jehoram still refuses to believe.

Are you believing the good news? Perhaps you think you could believe if you saw a miracle? That logic may make sense at one level. But Jesus said it is not true. In a parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.... If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets [Kings was considered in the Prophets category], neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:29, 31). In other words, the problem is not insufficient reason to believe. You have something sufficient called God's word. His promises are contained here. In Scripture, we read of the hero of the story, Jesus, crucified and risen, who says, "believe." The problem is not with a lack of proof, but with a skeptical, unbelieving heart.

The lepers are not the only unnamed instruments of deliverance. One of the king's servants proposes a reasonable solution. Take five men and check it out (13). The king sends them off on what he probably considered to be a "suicide mission" (14). However, they find the lepers story to be true, and come back and report the good news to the king.

Notice that we do not know the names of these guys either. God often uses nameless missionaries to bring salvation to the nations (cf., 1 Cor 1:26-29). We have greater news to pass on to the world than deliverance from Syria. We tell the world how to death has been defeated, and victory is ours through Christ.

Mercy and Judgment Experienced (16-20). The people hear the news, and they are like, "Le-go!" They head off and plunder the camp of the Syrians (16a). Elisha's word comes to pass regarding the flour and barley (16b). What about his word to the skeptical assassin? It comes true as well. The rushing mob "tramples him at the gate"

and he dies. It is stated twice in case we miss it (17, 20). It happened according to God's word through Elisha, whom he mocked previously.

God takes unbelief seriously. Do you think you can look at the evidences of God's grace in unbelief and that not provoke him? Think again. The author of Hebrews says it well, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God" (Heb 3:12). And later, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking" (Heb 12:25). To mock God's prophet, was to mock God, because he was speaking God's word. This assassin serves as a warning to everyone. We do not like this because of our soft, tolerant culture, and even in a church culture that is tempted to believe that the only attribute of God is love, never mind his holiness, truth and wrath. But the fact remains, you will be judged if you do not respond in faith to God's word. Paul told the Galatians, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Gal 6:7). In Kings we see that God gives people opportunities to repent, but they refuse. They essentially get what they want.

#4: The Obedience of a Soft Heart (8:1-6)

Elisha was God's special agent, who brought salvation not only to Israel in general, but to individuals in Israel and other nations. One of those individuals was this Shunammite woman who showed him hospitality, as we noticed in 2 Kings 4:8-37.

Elisha's Word (8:1). Elisha tells her that a seven-year famine is coming, and that she should sojourn somewhere until it is over (8:1). Provan tries to place the timing of this famine saying:

[W]e are presumably to understand, therefore, that this warning cited here was given to the woman around the same time that Elisha restored her son to life. We should distinguish this general state of famine from the famine in the city of Samaria (6:25 and 7:4), which seems to be a result of, rather than a circumstance preceding, the siege. The implication is that before the siege the city itself had not been suffering hunger to the same extent as the rest of the country. (207)

If this famine and Elisha's instructions are about the time of his raising her son (4:18-37), then Elisha's words to the woman back in 4:13 are particularly relevant. Elisha had asked her, "Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?" To which she responded at first, "I dwell among my people." She did not need such help at the time. However, now, because of a famine, she will be instructed to live outside of her people, and will be in need of a word spoken to the king

on her behalf. That is exactly what happens in 8:4-5. Once again, we see this woman being rewarded for caring for God's prophet (cf., Matt 10:40-42).

Her Obedience (2-3). The writer tells us, "So the woman arose and did according to the man of God" (2). She did exactly as Elisha said, demonstrating her soft heart. She believed that he was God's messenger. While others in the land would not believe Elisha (like Jehoram and his assassin), she believed him and obeyed. She illustrates Jesus' fourth type of heart in the parable of the four soils, "the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold" (Mark 4:20).

She lived in the land of the Philistines for seven years. Notice that in contrast to Jehoram, she patiently waits on the Lord for seven years. During that time, God protected her. But she unfortunately lost her house and land during her sojourn. Jehoram may have acted like his land-grabbing father and taken it (cf., 1 Kings 21). She is in need of help and a defender. She possibly lost her husband during this time, making her extra desperate.

God's Providence (4-6). Providently, when she arrives at the royal court to beg for her property, Gehazi is telling the king about this lady at the same time! (What is Gehazi doing here? Was he not struck with leprosy in 5:27? Yes, but those events seem to have happened after this event in 8:4-6). The king is curious about the work of Yahweh and his prophet, but certainly not committed to Yahweh. As Gehazi is telling the king all about how her son was raised from the dead, she walks in the room (perhaps even with her child). Gehazi advocated for the defenseless in this story, and it proved successful, as God providently used this encounter to move the king to restore not only all that was hers, but also all the income from her land that she would have received if she would have not left the country.

This lady received a simple word and she obeyed. Many received more messages from Elisha than her, like king Jehoram, and refused to believe. He was charmed by the truth at times, but never changed by the truth. Davis says it well, "The men of Nineveh will likely stand up at the judgment and condemn Jehoram and his heirs for they repented when they had only a simple word of judgment but no catalogue of grace" (135). Who are you like: the king – hearing gospel truths regularly but not responding; or, like this simple lady, who takes God's word as truth, obeying it?

The Broken-Hearted Prophet and the Decline of Judah (8:7-29)

In the rest of chapter 8, some important details are filled in for us. We learn about the fulfillment of Elijah's instructions. If you remember, he was to anoint Elisha, Hazael, and Jehu (1 Kings 19:15-17). He did anoint Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21), but we never heard of him anointing the other two men. The writer seems to intend for us to see that this is now going to happen through Elisha (Davis, 136). Elisha will set apart Hazael as God's instrument of judgment on Israel (8:12). We also read about how the kingdom of Judah is beginning to look more and more like the kingdom of Israel. After some decent kings, Asa and Jehoshaphat, we read of Jehoram and Ahaziah, who lead the country downward. All the while, we are still waiting for the house of Omri/Ahab to be eliminated. We have had an Omri king since 1 Kings 16:23 despite Elijah's prophecy in 1 Kings 21:21-24. We can feel the tension, as we wait. We are just one chapter away from Jehu ascending to the throne (1 Kings 19:16), who will execute judgment on this house.

A New Syrian King: Hazael (8:7-15). Ben-hadad is ill and he sends Hazael off to find Elisha, who is residing in Damascus (cf., 1 Kings 19:15). The king wants to know whether or not he will live (7-8). Interestingly, the foreign king sends for Elisha's prognosis, unlike Ahaziah of Israel inquired of Baal-zebul in his sickness (2 Kings 1:2). In order to sweeten up Elisha, a humongous gift is given to him – forty camel loads! (9). Imagine that scene! The sad reality is that the king only inquires as to whether or not he will recover. His vision is short-sited.

If I may use another beach illustration, my youngest son Joshua and I were out in the ocean. I was holding him as these big waves were coming at us. He said, "Oh Papa, don't drop me. Don't let me drown. I want to eat supper." I laughed because he obviously missed the bigger issue of drowning. If you drown, you have something bigger to think about than supper. Ben-hadad was worried about supper, when he should have been thinking about eternal life.

Elisha tells Hazael more than he wants to know. He gives him a bit of a riddle. He says, "Go, say to him, 'You shall certainly recover,' but the LORD has shown me that he shall certainly die" (10). This puzzle basically means that Ben-hadad is in fact going to die, but it is not going to be from his illness, but from something else. (For more on this, see Provan, 207).

Then we read of the weeping prophet, Elisha. He stares down Hazael and then breaks down in tears (11). Hazael asks Elisha why the tears. He answers him, "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 into pieces their little ones and rip open their pregnant women." (12). When Hazael questions this, Elisha

tells him that “The Lord has shown me that you are to be king over Syria” (13). This future prediction takes place, as Hazael brutally inflicts great suffering on Israel (cf., Amos 1:13; Hos. 13:16; 2 Kings 9:14-15; 12:17-18; 13:3-7; 15:16). Hazael rises to power by killing Ben-hadad. We read that he relays the message, “You will recover” (14), but then proceeds to apparently smother Ben-hadad to death (15).

Elisha’s broken-heartedness reminds us of other messengers of God’s. Ezekiel says on behalf of Yahweh, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (33:11). Paul said “For many, of whom, I have often told you and now tell you even *with tears*, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction” (Phil 3:18-19a, my emphasis; cf., Rom 9:1-5). Jesus himself wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). God must judge sinners, but he is slow to anger and full of mercy. When judgment comes, there is an element of divine sadness in it. Tears fall with the fire and brimstone. Elisha knew judgment was necessary but it was sad (Davis, 137). He was broken-hearted prophet.

If people are going to refuse to believe, and head off into destruction, then let them do so by walking through puddle of our prayerful tears. Are you broken for those who do not know the King? Let us learn from Elisha to weep over the unrepentant, and remember “God never blesses a tearless ministry” (Chuck Quarrles).

Kings in Judah (8:16-29). It has been a while since we have read of Judah. In 2 Kings 3, king Jehoshaphat was part of an unsuccessful attack on Moab. Now we learn of his son, Jehoram (another Jehoram – this one in Judah!). He was first mentioned in 1 Kings 22:50, and again in 2 Kings 1:17.

Judah begins to look more and more like Israel. Not only do their kings have the same name, but they begin practicing the same idolatry. The writer says that Jehoram “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 we evil in the sight of the LORD” (8:18). He apparently was given to the worship of golden calves like Jereboam, and also to the worship of Baal. This would mean that he was “worse” than the Jehoram of Israel (2 Kings 3:2-3). He has intermarried with Ahab’s daughter (Athaliah, v 26), and the idolatrous practices of that family has no infected Judah. They are all “one big evil family” now (Davis, 140). God does not eliminate them because he of his promise to David (19; cf. 2 Sam 7:12-16, 21:17; 1 Kings 11:36, 15:4). A lamp remains in Judah, by God’s grace. It would shine, ever so dimly, until the coming of King Jesus. Notice “Yahweh was not willing to destroy it.” These kings will fall, but God will keep his kingdom.

Edom fails to submit to king Jehoram (20-22). Gone are the days of Solomon who could rule over the nations. He faces the same problem that his northern counterpart faced, in failing to subdue Moab (2 Kings 3). Judah is forced to flee from the battlefield (21). Even cities in Judah are experiencing unrest, like Libnah (22b). The picture is one of great decline in Judah. We are told of his death in verses 23-24, and read that Ahaziah is the new king of Judah.

Ahaziah (not to be confused with Israel's Ahaziah in 1 Kings 1:51-2 King 1) follows in the sins of his father Jehoram, and the family of Ahab/Omri (25-27). He reigns a whole year! (26). In verses 28-29, we find that he went to war with Israel against Hazael (probably sending troops, not going himself). In the battle, Joram (same as Jehoram, different spellings are used) gets wounded. Ahaziah went down to visit Jehoram in Jezreel (29b). But that was the last visit he would make. For now, the stage is set for judgment. Joram is in Jezreel and Ahaziah is visiting him. They did not know what was coming (peak ahead to 2 Kings 9:14-16).

We are left to marvel at the nature of God. From these stories, it is clear that God is "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex 34:6-7). For all who call to him, there is salvation – from Syrian to Israel to Bangladesh to Raleigh. "But you are a God, ready to forgive" Nehemiah prayed (Neh 9:17). But for those who refuse to embrace Christ as Savior and Lord, judgment will come. A day of grace is here now, so respond before the day of judgment comes. You can have the stubborn heart like Ben-hadad; a superficial heart like Jehoram; or a skeptical heart like his assassin. But you will wish you had believed like the Shunnamite woman.

God's divine mercy and justice has been most gloriously displayed in the cross of Jesus. There, the sinless one bore the judgment that we deserved, in order that we may experience everlasting mercy and grace. Look to him, and flee the wrath to come. A wrath that is worse than anything we read in kings. In Christ, you are safe. In Christ, you are free from condemnation.