

THE FAMINE AND GOD'S PROVISION FOR HIS PEOPLE

BIBLE TEXT : II Kings 6:24-33; 7:1-20; 8:1-15.

LESSON 316 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling" (Psalm 91:9, 10)..

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

2 Kings 6:24-33

²⁴ And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria.

²⁵ And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore *pieces* of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five *pieces* of silver.

²⁶ And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king.

²⁷ And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?

²⁸ And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow.

²⁹ So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.

³⁰ And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, *he had* sackcloth within upon his flesh.

³¹ Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.

³² But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and *the king* sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: *is* not the sound of his master's feet behind him?

³³ And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil *is* of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?

2 Kings 7:1-20

¹ Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time *shall* a measure of fine flour *be sold* for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.

² Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, *if* the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said,

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Distress of Samaria

1. Ben-hadad, king of Syria, besieges Samaria and reduces the city to great distress, II Kings 6:24, 25.
2. A woman tells her pitiful story to the king, who blames conditions on Elisha, and vows to destroy him, II Kings 6:26-31;

Leviticus 26:25-29

²⁵ **And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.**

²⁶ **And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied.**

²⁷ **And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me;**

²⁸ **Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.**

²⁹ **And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat.**

Deuteronomy 28:53

⁵³ **And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee:**

3. The Lord reveals the plot to Elisha, who foretells relief from the famine, II Kings 6:32, 33; 7:1, 2.

II The Decision and Action of Four Lepers

1. Four lepers, perishing with hunger, find the Syrians' camp deserted, II Kings 7:3-5.
2. The Lord causes the Syrians to hear the noise of a great host of chariots. They flee, leaving their camp and horses behind, II Kings 7:6-8;

2 Kings 19:7

⁷ **Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.**

Proverbs 28:1

¹ **The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.**

3. The lepers partake of the spoils and say one to another: "This day is a day of good tidings, . . . come, that we may go and tell the king's household," II Kings 7:9-11.
4. Elisha's prophecy comes true, II Kings 7:12-20.

III A Conversation Between the King and Gehazi

1. The sojourning of the Shunammite woman for seven years is related, II Kings 8:1, 2.
2. While the king converses with Gehazi about Elisha, the Shunammite returns and solicits the king for her land, II Kings 8:1-6.

Behold, thou shalt see *it* with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

³ And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?

⁴ If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine *is* in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.

⁵ And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, *there was* no man there.

⁶ For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, *even* the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

⁷ Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, *even* the camp as it *was*, and fled for their life.

⁸ And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid *it*; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence *also*, and went and hid *it*.

⁹ Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day *is* a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.

¹⁰ So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, *there was* no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they *were*.

¹¹ And he called the porters; and they told *it* to the king's house within.

¹² And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we *be* hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.

¹³ And one of his servants answered and said, Let *some* take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they *are* as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, *I say*, they *are* even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see.

IV The Death of Ben-hadad

1. Ben-hadad is sick and sends Hazael to Elisha, II Kings 8:7–9.

2. Elisha predicts Ben-hadad's death and Hazael kills the king, II Kings 8:10–15.

NOTES:

Famines

Famines are many times sent by God because of sin and disobedience. This famine in Samaria was a direct result of Ahab's sin. Ahab had married Jezebel, an idolatrous Phoenician woman. We read: "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" (I Kings 21:25). In his last days, Ahab humbled himself before the Lord; and because of this the Lord did not let the evil that was pronounced against Ahab come to pass in his days but brought it to pass in his son's day.

Our lesson opens with Jehoram, the son of Ahab, reigning in Samaria, and Ben-hadad, king of Syria, besieging the city.

Distress in the City

The famine was very great in the city. The people were in sore distress. Women were eating their own children, a curse that Moses said would come upon them if they disobeyed the Lord (**Deuteronomy 28:51-53** ⁵¹ **And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee.** ⁵² **And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.** ⁵³ **And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee:).**). Many people seem to think they can go on in their own ways, disobeying God's commands, and still escape punishment. But we find God's judgments always follow sin. The Word of God states: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). The seed of disobedience produces a terrific harvest. The people of Samaria were finding it out.

The king of Israel wanted to lay the blame on Elisha for the awful conditions in the city. The natural man likes to lay the blame for his sins and wrongdoings on someone else. He tries to shield himself and say the other fellow is guilty. God knows the heart. He can look right down and say, "Thou art the man."

The king planned to take Elisha's life. The Lord revealed it to Elisha and he escaped the plot. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (II Peter 2:9). He always cares for His own. Nothing can come to one of God's people but what He allows. The godly man has the promise upon which he can depend, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper."

Elisha

Elisha had followed up the work of Elijah, with schools for the young prophets at Samaria, Dothan, Bethel, Jericho, Shunem, and Carmel. Elisha was possibly teaching in Samaria when the city was besieged. The Lord had performed many miracles by the hand of Elisha, and now another mighty miracle was soon to take place.

The Lord remembers His own and never forsakes them, even

¹⁴ They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see.

¹⁵ And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way *was* full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king.

¹⁶ And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was *sold* for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.

¹⁷ And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him.

¹⁸ And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria:

¹⁹ And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, *if* the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

²⁰ And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.

2 Kings 8:1-15

¹ Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years.

² And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.

³ And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land.

⁴ And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.

⁵ And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this *is* the woman, and this *is* her son, whom Elisha restored to life.

⁶ And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that *was* hers, and all the fruits of the field since the

in the time of famine. No doubt in this school of the prophets were men who loved righteousness. They, together with Elisha, were the "salt" of Samaria. Another promise that is given to the godly is, "They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied" (Psalm 37:19).

Unbelief

When Elisha sent word to the king that "to morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, . . . in the gate of Samaria," the official on whose hand the king leaned, scoffed at the idea. He questioned: "Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" His unbelief kept him from partaking of the bounty that the rest of the city soon enjoyed. Unbelief in one's heart will always keep him from enjoying God's blessings. This official had been appointed to keep the gate in Samaria; and, in the mad rush of the people who were going to and from the camp of the Syrians to get food, he was knocked down, trodden upon, and killed. Some might say it was an accident, but it was a fulfilment of God's word. The Lord has His own way of bringing things to pass. Faith will put God's promises into effect. Unbelief will keep a person out of the Kingdom of God.

Good Tidings

The four lepers were hungry men. They could not hope to get any food from the city. If they stayed outside the city walls, they would perish. If they went to the camp of the Syrians, the Syrians might have mercy on them and spare them alive. They had a decision to make, and they might have felt that they would take a chance.

There is no chance for a sinner so long as he remains in sin. He can but perish. But when the sinner decides to come to Jesus, there is hope. In the parable we see that when the prodigal son was perishing with hunger, he came to himself and realised there was plenty and to spare in his father's house. He decided to arise and go home. He put his choice into action. These lepers did the same thing.

We do not know if the Lord amplified the noise of their footsteps as they went down the highway; but we do know that the Syrians heard the noise of a great host coming. They became panic-stricken and fled, leaving their tents and supplies behind.

When the lepers entered the camp they found an abundance of food and raiment. For a while they feasted, and then they realised there was an abundance of food in the abandoned camp for all the city of Samaria. They said one to another: "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household."

Telling the Story

To be starving and then suddenly come into the midst of plenty was enough to make it a day of good tidings to those lepers. It is also a day of good tidings when a sinner steps out of the thralldom of sin into the glorious liberty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In a spiritual sense, he steps from want to plenty, from darkness to light, from bondage to liberty. The very word **Gospel** means **good news** or **glad tidings**.

Right away the lepers wanted to tell the king's household. The news they had was too good to keep; they wanted to share it with others. When we are saved we find something so wonderful

day that she left the land, even until now.

⁷ And Elisha came to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither.

⁸ And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?

⁹ So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Benhadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?

¹⁰ And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die.

¹¹ And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept.

¹² And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.

¹³ And Hazael said, But what, *is* thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou *shalt be* king over Syria.

¹⁴ So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me *that* thou shouldest surely recover.

¹⁵ And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped *it* in water, and spread *it* on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead.

we want to tell others about it too, for there is an abundance of this wonderful salvation.

"Tell it again! Tell it again!

Salvation's story repeat o'er and o'er,

Till none can say of the children of men,

'Nobody ever has told me before!'"

Confirmation of the Truth

Elisha's prophecy and the miraculous way in which the Lord provided food must have softened the king's heart. We find the king conversing with Gehazi and wanting to know all the great things that Elisha had done. Some think Gehazi was one of the four lepers who went to the camp of the Syrians. Evidently Gehazi was not holding any resentment in his heart against Elisha for the curse Elisha had pronounced against him when his covetous heart reached out for a gift from Naaman. We find Gehazi very enthusiastic in his telling the king about the miracles Elisha had wrought. As he was telling about the young man who had been raised from the dead — at that very moment — the Lord sent the Shunammite woman to the king. She had come to the king to beg for the recovery of her land which she had lost during the seven years of famine. She had gone to the land of the Philistines, at the word of Elisha, to escape the suffering during the famine. When Gehazi saw her he cried out, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life."

When the Lord wants to confirm a truth, He has His own way of doing it. It may be that the Lord wanted to soften the king's heart so that he would be willing to grant the woman her land again. Many a converted criminal's testimony of salvation has softened an officer's heart and caused him to grant freedom to the man.

The Death of Ben-hadad

In the closing scene of our lesson we find Elisha going to Damascus, the capital of Syria. Ben-hadad was sick, and he sent Hazael, possibly the highest officer in his cabinet, to Elisha that Ben-hadad might know whether he would recover from his sickness. As this man stood before Elisha, the Lord revealed to Elisha that Hazael would be king over Syria. Elisha also saw the awful atrocities this man would commit against the Children of Israel. Elisha wept. Hazael began the evil deeds prophesied of him by going back to the king and smothering him with a thick cloth, taking over the kingdom of Syria.

We see here the terrible end of Ben-hadad, who had fought many battles against the Children of Israel. God had said, "Cursed is he that curseth thee" (Number 24:9).

QUESTIONS

1. What caused the famine in Samaria?
2. On whom did the king blame the famine?
3. Tell how Elisha protected himself from the anger of the king.
4. What caused the Syrian army to flee? Who discovered they had fled?
5. Tell of the unselfishness of the lepers.
6. When a sinner is saved why does he want to tell others about it?
7. Why did Elisha weep when Hazael came to him?
8. Describe the death of Ben-hadad.