

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## A God Who Saves and Judges II Kings 8:1-15

**Intro:** We have here a couple of seemingly random stories that appear to not have anything to do with the historical flow of II Kings. But, as we've pointed out before, the author's been very selective with the information he's included in his record of the kings of Judah and Israel. This then begs the question: so what? Why should we care about a woman who moves from her home country? Why should we care about a conversation between a prophet's servant and a king? Why should we care about yet another coup in an ancient Near eastern kingdom? We should care because each of these stories reveals our God to us. That is, of course, the main business of Scripture and we must always approach the Bible with that theocentric concept in mind.

We're given a hint of the focus of the first story by the use of the Hebrew verb translated restore to life. It's used 4 times in the first six verses in reference to Elisha's restoring the Shunammite's son back to life (4:8-37). The same Hebrew verb is used in another form at least 4 times in the second story when Ben-hadad asks if he will recover from his illness. However, the focus of this passage is not on any recovery this king makes but on the ruin and suffering his successor will bring upon Israel. So you could say that this passage reveals Yahweh as both the life giver (1-6) and the death-bringer (7-15).

**1-2** – The background of this story takes place in ch4 but the foreground of our story is something Elisha said to this woman. He gives her a tip about some hard times that were coming her way (1) and some advice as to what to do about it (2). You could say this was some kind of insider trading, not of commodities but of privileged information. Yahweh often used famines to chastise His people when they were disobedient and needed to be reminded of their covenant obligations. This may have even been the famine mentioned in 4:38. Regardless, the woman follows the prophet's counsel, apparently to her benefit and she rides out the famine in Philistia for 7 years.

Why does she receive this special insight? Why is she alone out of all Israel

given this help? The answer goes all the way back to 4:9-10 when this woman proposed a small house remodeling project to her husband. She sensed that Elisha was a holy man of God and wanted to make these accommodations for him. She wasn't looking for special treatment or a special blessing; she wanted to assist Elisha simply because he was the Lord's servant. This is an OT case of Mt 10:41-42. God doesn't miss cups of cold water and He remembers this woman's kindness to His servant by granting kindness to her. Of course, the object of your kindness doesn't have to be a prophet or minister; it can be a kindness to a child or to the most obscure of Christ's people (to one of the least of these My brethren, Mt 25:40).

So here is Yahweh's kindness to her in His famine warning system. It might not sound like much to us but we've never had to suffer through a 1 year famine let alone a 7 year. Just imagine what it must have meant to her and to her family! Sure, this is not the main focus of the story but what a great encouragement Elisha's tip must have been to her, assuring her that the Keeper of Israel had by no means forgotten her small but thoughtful act of kindness. What may seem insignificant to us could be a huge boost to the one on the receiving end. We might not think it's a big deal so why bother but it may very well be the one thing that encourages the other person to carry on; that delivers help in the time of their greatest need. A small kindness often carries a massive encouragement.

3-6 – 7 years have passed and the famine is over. The Shunammite returns from Philistia but apparently someone has grabbed up her inheritance: either squatters have moved into her property or the king had appropriated it for his administration. She now needs to go seek an audience with the king to plead for a remedy to this unfortunate set of circumstances. Here, the author describes a vivid scene as the king is in the process of visiting with Gehazi.

Wait; what? Gehazi! What's he doing here when he was stricken with leprosy back in 5:27? Wouldn't he be excluded from general society by now; an outcast of the worst sort? Probably, but there's a logical explanation for this. Clearly, the author expects us to understand that the stories he has provided in his record, while factually accurate, are not necessarily in chronological order. It's quite probable that the Naaman episode occurred after this event. There were theological considerations that governed the

placement of these stories and chronology wasn't crucial. Of course, it is still possible that Gehazi could have been called to appear before the king if his leprosy was still in its beginning stages. We're all quite familiar with social distancing and it's not likely the 2 of them were huddles up in a corner.

Back to v4: the king has called Gehazi before him to provide him with information. Tell is the key word here; it's used 3 times in 3 verses (4-6). What does the king want to be told? He wants to hear all about the deeds of Elisha that weren't so public. Some of Elisha's works were well known to the king because he was included in them (ch3&6) but he had no doubt heard rumors concerning other astounding deeds Elisha had performed among the faithful remnant or his inner circle of student prophets and the king wanted to hear about those deeds first hand from an eye witness. This would include all the scenes in ch4 and 6:1-7 and maybe others not recorded in e II Kings text.

So, the king's getting an ear-full. Gehazi tells him that Elisha had even restored the dead back to life and launches into the story about the Shunammite woman and the death of her son. Now at this point, Gehazi may've almost lost his dentures because right in the middle of his story about the Shunammite woman, she shows up with her son, crying out to the king about her home and property! Gehazi is nearly beside himself: Habada, habada...this is the woman! This is her son! He was dead as a door nail – I know, I was there! This is the kid that Elisha brought back to life and now they're here! Go figure!

What divine timing! So the king asked her to recount the story and she rehearsed the whole episode, confirming Gehazi's report. This so impressed the king that he personally designated an officer to handle her case and to see that not only are her home and lands restored to her but also whatever losses she may have suffered from the sale of her farm's produce.

So, all's well that ends well. Or is it? What's the theological significance of this text? Why is this story here? The king (presumably Jehoram) hears the testimony of all the great deeds Elisha had done, at least the ones that he had no personal knowledge of. He was already familiar with the divine mercies that had been extended to him but now he also knew of the mighty acts of divine deliverance performed by God through Elisha, even deliverance from death. All of this makes the king incredibly accountable!

How will he respond to this massive, undeniable testimony of the grace of God? Elisha had previously chastised him for his pagan apostasy in [3:13-14](#); has he changed his behavior? Will he change? According to the summary of [3:1-3](#), he never makes a positive commitment to Yahweh.

Clearly, he's very impressed with the testimony of Yahweh's power manifested through Elisha's ministry; impressed enough to give the Shunammite justice. He's obviously very interested in the stories; is apparently fascinated with the first-hand testimony, but he remains unchanged. So we have a king who is curious but not committed. He is attracted to Elisha's works but not submissive to Elisha's Lord. This was royal fascination not faith. It's similar to Paul's experience with King Agrippa in [Acts 26](#). Agrippa was curious of Paul's case and interested in his defense but when it came to making a decision about the gospel, he wasn't fully convinced. You almost persuade me to become a Christian ([Acts 26:28b](#)).

The Jehoram syndrome is quite common even in our day. Many people recognize both the power and the pull of the gospel without ever embracing the truth of that gospel. There is a vast difference between being charmed by the truth and being converted to the truth. King Jehoram has now made himself terribly accountable to God for as Jesus declared in [Lk 12:48b](#), to whom much is given, from him much will be required... the king knew that God was with the actions of Elisha, giving evidence that He was also with the words of Elisha. The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment and condemn King Jehoram and all of unfaithful Israel because they fully repented when they only had a simple word of judgment while Jehoram and Israel had a complete catalogue of God's grace ([Lk 11:32](#)).

**7-15** – Why is Elisha going to Syria? The leaders there had once tried to kill or at least capture him. At the same time, since God had miraculously delivered Elisha so many times and he played a critical part in Naaman's healing, he was now respected and welcome in the royal court of Syria. He was likely especially welcome at this time on account of the king's illness. Of course, in answer to the question of why was he going to Syria, we can't forget God's directive to Elijah way back in [1 Kings 19](#). He gave Elijah a 3-fold commission: anoint Hazael as king of Syria, anoint Jehu as king of Israel and anoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah was only able to fulfill 1 of those commissions before he was whisked away into heaven by a whirlwind. The other 2 commissions now fell to Elisha and it seems this is

the occasion for one of them to be accomplished.

But, what about Elisha's response to Hazael in v10? He tells Hazael to tell the sick king that he will recover but, just between you, me and the fence post, he's really going to die. Is there a contradiction here? Is Elisha fudging on the truth? We see that the king doesn't recover...mainly because Hazael chokes the life out of him. The king's at death's door and Hazael pulls him through.

The truth is: Elisha's response to the king's question is both yes and no. Yes, if left to the normal process of healing – the king will recover; and no, because Elisha knew that Hazael in his treachery would use the king's illness to effect his own ascension to the throne. Thus, Hazael could testify truly that the illness wouldn't be fatal. So Elisha's word about Ben-hadad's recovery carries an implied "all things being equal" with it. He would certainly recover from it barring any Machiavellian interference. In any case, the 2 appearances of the phrase the Lord has shown me carry the most weight in the text. The long and the short of it is this...he'll die, you'll be king!

This scene marks a turning point in Elisha's ministry. As we listen in on his conversation with Hazael, we must also remember what Yahweh had told Elijah on Mt Horeb back in I Kings 19:17. Elijah was to anoint 3 instruments of judgment to scourge an unfaithful Israel: Hazael, Jehu and Elisha. Elijah did claim Elisha for Yahweh's service but we have heard nothing about Hazael or Jehu being anointed. Be that as it may, it appears the author intends for us to see that Elisha is here now setting apart Hazael to be Yahweh's instrument to bring judgment upon Israel. In ch2-7 Elisha has served primarily as a minister of God's grace to Israel, but in ch8-10 he will appear as a minister of God's judgment. Israel is sinning away her day of grace!

The emphasis of this passage is in v11-12. Elisha stares down Hazael until the latter becomes uncomfortable, most likely he was receiving divine prophetic insight in real time. Then, to add to the awkwardness of the moment, Elisha just breaks down and weeps. Hardened military men are not used to being around crying prophets. This disturbs Hazael and he asks the reason for the tears. Elisha provides him with the whole, horrific vision. This sounds horrific to us but to Hazael, it was merely the normal atrocities



of war. Hazael is puzzled and probably a little ecstatic. All this horror would look good on his resume but he doesn't see how he'd be in a position to accomplish such feats. That is until Elisha tells him that he will be the new king. That doesn't bode well for the old king because Hazael immediately decides to assist in the fulfillment of that prophetic vision. "King Ben-hadad, does this rag smell like chloroform?"

So, Hazael runs off to plan his political future but we need to stick around a minute and watch Elisha weeping. What we see in Elisha's attitude here is a reflection of God's attitude ([Ez 33:11](#)) and the attitude of Jesus in [Lk 19:41-44](#). God is as holy, just and righteous as He is compassionate, longsuffering and gracious. But, since He is just and righteous, He must and will judge His apostate people. But also, since He is so slow to anger and full of mercy, there is an element of divine sadness in His judgment. One commentator put it this way, "I think He will weep over the lost as He did over Jerusalem. It will be something to be said forever in heaven, "Jesus wept as He said, "Depart, you cursed." Or a similar perspective, "I think the shower of fire and brimstone [that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah] was wet with the tears of God as it fell, for God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

The Apostle Paul had a similar attitude towards his fellow countrymen. Certainly, the Jews didn't have a monopoly on apostolic abuse because the Gentiles had plenty of opportunities to get some lick in on Paul too but the Jews were especially tenacious. They were always the first one Paul would preach the gospel to in a new city and some would believe but those who didn't would turn on him quickly. First they would resist him then harass him and if he still didn't catch their drift, they would begin to persecute him out right. They even attempted to kill him on several occasions. After all of this he was still able to write in [Rom 9:2](#) that he had great sorrow and continual grief in his heart for the Jews to the point that he would be willing to forgo his own salvation if it meant they would all be saved. Of course, salvation doesn't work that way but we understand his pain for his people.

Here, Hazael is excited and enthusiastic over the fine future laid out before him, a future in which he will batter and crush Israel. But Elisha is disheartened and depressed. He knows there must be a Hazael as Yahweh's instrument to judge His faithless people. But for Elisha, judgment is both necessary and sad. Elisha's tears are sent from above because that's how God views it. There's no fiendish delight in Yahweh's judgment;

there's only pain and sadness because this isn't what God had intended for His people. His desire was to bless them by and with His grace but since they refused His grace than they must endure his righteous judgment.

Here's our God and we should worship Him for His nature, a God who mingles His tears with the fire and brimstone.

You might not think these are the most spellbinding stories in the Bible and you would be correct. But, what they lack in excitement they make up for with instruction. In the divine kindness the woman received we see a kindness that should encourage us; in the truth that the king received we see a responsibility that should sober us; in the tears the prophet shed we see a judgment that should sadden us. What we've seen here is a glimpse of our God, a God who revives and slays; a God who both gives life and takes it away.

This is a clear representation of what Paul calls the goodness and severity of God in [Rom 11:22](#) and he calls us to consider it. We like the goodness and don't want to consider the severity, even though the severity is as real as the goodness. Here's the thing – as believers in Jesus Christ, we have been the recipients of all of God's goodness and we will never have to experience His severity if we would just continue in His goodness. If we have a tendency to resist or reject His goodness in our lives as represented by His word and will, then we can and should expect to get a taste of His severity.

God doesn't enjoy spreading His severity around to His children. He would much rather we just repent and submit to His will for our lives. His plans for us are much bigger and better than anything we could ever devise for ourselves. 😊