



Second Kings - Chapter Six

II 2 Kings 2:1-10:36 - Elisha and Israel (continues)

Summary of Chapter Six

The chapter starts with yet another miracle. Elisha was with some prophets cutting wood when one of them dropped his borrowed axe into the River Jordan. He told Elisha who through a stick into the river near where the axe was lost and behold the iron axe floated to the surface and was retrieved.

Each time the king of Aram planned a raid on Israel, Elisha notified the Israelite king and the attack was thwarted. When the king of Aram was told that it was Elisha that was responsible for the failures he gave orders that he should be captured in the town of Dothan. The Aramæans surrounded Dothan and Elisha's servant was afraid so Elisha prayed that his eyes might be opened and immediately the servant saw the heavenly host on the hillside protecting them from the Aramæans. Then Elisha prayed that the Aramæans should be blinded so that he could lead them to Samaria and it was so. When he handed them over to the king of Israel he wanted to kill these soldiers but Elisha said they should be shown hospitality, fed and released back to their master.

King Ben-hadad of Syria lay siege on Samaria and there was great famine in the city. A woman told the king that she had an agreement with her neighbour that they should cook and eat the first woman's son one day and then the other woman's on the second. The first child was cooked and eaten but on the second day the other woman had hidden her child. The king was in great distress over what was happening. He blamed Elisha for the famine from God and sent men to arrest him but Elisha prophesied that the following day the famine would end.

II.e 2 Kings 6:1-23 - Elisha and Syria

With the healing of Naaman, Elisha has involved himself with Aram or Syria for the first time. That involvement now occupies most of the attention of the authors for the next two chapters, as they prepare the reader for the bloody events of Chapters 8-10.

II.e.i 2 Kings 6:1-7 - The Miracle of the Axehead

While one of the prophetic communities is building a new place to meet, a member of the group loses a borrowed axehead. Elisha has past experience of manipulating the waters of the Jordan by the Lord's power in 2 Kings 2:14, and here he is miraculously able to make the iron float like the piece of wood he has thrown in beside it.

¹ Now the company of prophets said to Elisha, 'As you see, the place where we live under your charge is too small for us.' ² Let us go to the Jordan, and let us collect logs there, one for each of us, and build a place there for us to live.' He answered, 'Do so.' ³ Then one of them said, 'Please come with your servants.' And he answered, 'I will.'

2 Kings 6:1-3

The place where we live under your charge is too small for us. This indicates that at this time Elisha had a significant impact on the nation. The old facility for housing the company of prophets was not large enough to meet the needs of all those who wanted to be trained in ministry.

Please come with your servants. Elisha did not initiate or lead this work of building a new centre for training the prophets, but it could not happen without his approval and blessing, i.e. do so.

⁴ So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. ⁵ But as one was felling a log, his axehead fell into the water; he cried out, 'Alas, master! It was borrowed.' ⁶ Then the man of God said, 'Where did it fall?' When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. ⁷ He said, 'Pick it up.' So he reached out his hand and took it.

2 Kings 6:4-7

His axehead fell into the water. This was a significant loss. Iron was certainly present at this time in Israel, but it was not common enough to be cheap.

Alas, master! It was borrowed. The man who lost the axehead was rightly sensitive to the fact that he had lost something that belonged to someone else, making the loss more acute. Although the law did not extend to such items the principle is clear from that of borrowed livestock: <<*When someone borrows an animal from another and it is injured or dies, the owner not being present, full restitution shall be made*>> (Exodus 22:14).

He cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. This was an obvious and unique miracle. There was no trickery in the way that Elisha put the stick in the water, it was simply an expression of his faith that God honoured. In many ways it is similar to the cleansing of the water supply with a little salt in 2 Kings 2:21, or the poisoned food with a little flour in 2 Kings 4:41.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “God can do all things, he can make iron swim - we cannot - and yet you see the prophet did it, and he did it by the use of a stick. He cut down a stick. Was there any connection between the stick and the iron? I can’t see any, and yet God does use means, and he would have us use means.”

Pick it up. Conceivably, God could have arranged a way for the axehead to appear right in the man’s hand without any effort on his part. But this miracle worked in a familiar way when God does the part only he can do, and he leaves the part to people that they can do. Elisha actions in the name of the Lord then caused the submerged axehead to surface and he then instructed the student to retrieve the axe; thus the student would personally participate in the miracle.

II.e.ii 2 Kings 6:8-23 - The Aramæan Attack Is Thwarted

Because of his prophetic knowledge Elisha was able to tell the king of Israel the plans of the king of Aram and his planned attacks were prevented. When Elisha was trapped in Dothan by the Aramæans he was protected by a heavenly host and he prayed that the Lord would blind the attackers so that he could lead them to the king of Israel in Samaria. The king wanted to kill the captives but Elisha said they should be fed and then released.

⁸ Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he took counsel with his officers. He said, ‘At such and such a place shall be my camp.’

⁹ But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, ‘Take care not to pass this place, because the Aramæans are going down there.’ ¹⁰ The king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of God spoke. More than once or twice he warned such a place so that it was on the alert.

2 Kings 6:8-10

Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel. The relationship between Syria and Israel has deteriorated since Chapter 5.

The man of God sent word. Elisha intervenes to help King Jehoram, not because anything has changed in his behaviour but simply because the time has not yet arrived for final judgement on this royal house, which will come about in Chapters 9-10. Elisha did not support the corrupt monarchs of Israel, but he knew that it was even worse for Israel to be conquered and subjugated under Syria. Therefore, he gave the king of Israel information from divinely inspired espionage. Prophetic oracles apparently were often sought or offered in the ancient Near East in relation to military campaigns; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 3:11-14.

Elisha received warnings for the nation, whereas Jeremiah received a similar warning concerning his own safety: <<It was the Lord who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds>> (Jeremiah 11:18).

¹¹ The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, ‘Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?’ ¹² Then one of his officers said, ‘No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber.’ ¹³ He said, ‘Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him.’ He was told, ‘He is in Dothan.’ ¹⁴ So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city.

2 Kings 6:11-14

Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel? The king of Syria was naturally mystified by the way the king of Israel knew all of Syria’s plans beforehand. He was convinced there was a traitor among his own people until one servant revealed that it was Elisha, the prophet in Israel who knew and revealed these things, even the words that you speak in your bedchamber. Such knowledge could only come by revelation through the Holy Spirit to Elisha.

Dothan is only 10 miles or 16 km north of the capital city of Samaria, illustrating the extent of Aramæan penetration into Israel at this time. However, the Aramæan king is deluded in his belief that he can send his men to seize Elisha, as confirmed by Jeroboam’s attempts to seize a prophet in 1 Kings 13:1-6 and by the attempts made by King Ahaziah’s men to capture Elijah in 2 Kings 1:2-17.

They came by night, and surrounded the city. This was a common tactic hoping that they could prevent Elisha from escaping from them, which he might have done had they approached in daylight. Of course, if God had wanted Elisha to

escape he would have allowed him to escape anyway despite the plans of those who sought him. This is similar to the protection over Paul when he was trapped in Damascus: *<<After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket>>* (Acts 9:23-25).

¹⁵ When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, 'Alas, master! What shall we do?' ¹⁶ He replied, 'Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them.'

2 Kings 6:15-16

Alas, master! What shall we do? When Elisha's servant saw the horses and chariots and a great army surrounding their city, he was naturally afraid. He knew that there was little chance of escaping or surviving an attack by so many soldiers.

Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them. Elisha knows that the Lord has sent an army of angels to protect him, and apparently he can see them but the servant cannot. They are more than a match for the Aramæan army, as confirmed by: *<<For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways>>* (Psalm 91:11), *<<Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?>>* (Matthew 26:53), and: *<<Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?>>* (Hebrews 1:14). This seemed unbelievable to Elisha's servant. He saw the horses, the chariots, and the great army surrounding them. He could not see anyone who was with Elisha and himself. Elisha gave his servant a reason not to fear. This was not empty hope or wishful thinking; it was a real reason for confidence, even if the servant could not see it. The words of a later prophet sum up the hope that the servant could have in God as a member of his faithful people: *<<But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off'; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand>>* (Isaiah 41:8-10)

¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed: 'O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2 Kings 6:17

Then Elisha prayed: ‘O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.’ Elisha did not pray that God would change anything in the situation. His only request was that his servant could actually see the reality of the situation. Yet, Elisha also did not try to persuade the servant of the reality of those who were with them. The servant could not have this explained to him nor could he be persuaded into it. He had to see it.

So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant. The angelic armies had been there all along, but they were invisible to Elisha’s servant until the Lord enabled him to see them. This is similar to: <<*Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face*>> (Numbers 22:31), <<*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us’*>> (Luke 2:13-15), and is ultimately ‘seen’ in Jesus, for: <<*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him*>> (Colossians 1:15-16).

The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire. When his eyes were opened, the servant saw the reality that he could not see before. He saw that there really were more with him and Elisha than those assembled against them. The previous lack of perception on the part of Elisha’s servant did not make the reality of the spiritual army any less real. If there are 50 people who do not see something, it does not invalidate the perception of one who does see. Aramæan troops may surround (Hebrew *sabab*) the city (v.15), but Elisha himself is supported all around (Hebrew *sabib*) by the army of the Lord.

God answered Elisha’s prayer. When a person is blind to spiritual reality, only God can open their eyes. God may do it through the words someone speaks, but the work of spiritually opening eyes is spiritual work and belongs to God alone.

Horses and chariots were the most sophisticated and mighty military instruments of the day. However, the invisible army of God had literally more firepower than the horses and chariots of the Aramæans. The spiritual army had chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon ‘Three Sights Worth Seeing’ said, “That you have not perceived spiritual things is true; but it is no proof that there are

none to perceive. The whole case is like that of the Irishman who tried to upset evidence by non-evidence. Four witnesses saw him commit a murder. He pleaded that he was not guilty, and wished to establish his innocence by producing forty persons who did not see him do it. Of what use would that have been? So, if forty people declare that there is no power of the Holy Ghost going with the word, this only proves that the forty people do not know what others do know.”

¹⁸ When the Aramæans came down against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘Strike this people, please, with blindness.’ So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked.

2 Kings 6:18

Strike this people, please, with blindness. The Aramæan soldiers could not see the spiritual army, so they did not hesitate to approach Elisha. But just as he previously prayed that God would give sight to his servant, he then asked God to strike these soldiers with blindness. God answered this prayer; just as he had previously answered the prayer to give perception to the servant. This shows that God may grant sight or send blindness, according to his wisdom and in response to the prayers of his people. An excellent example of this is God’s response when Paul confronted Bar-Jesus in Cyprus: *<<And now listen – the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.’ Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand>>* (Acts 13:11).

So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked. This was probably not a loss of physical sight since the Aramæans would not doubt their location just because they could no longer physically see it, but rather a dazed mental condition in which they are open to suggestion and manipulation but still able to follow the prophet to Samaria. The Aramæans are ‘bedazzled’ and do not ‘see’ things clearly, whereas Elisha’s servant has been given perfect clarity of ‘sight’ about reality.

¹⁹ Elisha said to them, ‘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.

2 Kings 6:19

I will bring you to the man whom you seek. The statement is somewhat puzzling, but rather than leaving the Aramæans, Elisha did in fact bring them face to face with the man they were looking for because when they could again ‘see’ Elisha was indeed with them. However, they were in a place where they did not want to be - the capital of Israel and in the presence of their main enemy, King Jehoram.

Yet, Elisha's gentle deception demonstrates a principle: the blind are easily deceived. Those who are spiritually blind should appreciate that they can be easily deceived regarding spiritual things. This is well illustrated when Jesus spoke with the man born blind and to some Pharisees nearby: <<Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains'>> (John 9:39-41).

²⁰ As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, 'O Lord, open the eyes of these men so that they may see.' The Lord opened their eyes, and they saw that they were inside Samaria. ²¹ When the king of Israel saw them he said to Elisha, 'Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?' ²² He answered, 'No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink; and let them go to their master.' ²³ So he prepared for them a great feast; after they ate and drank, he sent them on their way, and they went to their master. And the Aramæans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel.

2 Kings 6:20-23

No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Jehoram may or not have killed opposing soldiers taken captive with his sword and bow, and these are not even men like that. They are to be treated as guests. There is a clear lesson here that compassion and mercy should be shown to all.

Instead of killing these enemy soldiers, Elisha instead commanded the king of Israel to treat them with kindness and generosity. This practice of answering evil with good successfully changed the policy of freelance raiders from Syria, i.e. the Aramæans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel. Jesus commanded: <<But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked>> (Luke 6:35), and Paul wrote: <<No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads'>> (Romans 12:20). For further explanation refer to the comments made on those passages.

II.f 2 Kings 6:24-7:20 - War at Samaria

The uneasy peace of Chapter 5 gave way in vv.8-23 to sporadic fighting involving Aramæan raids into Israelite territory, was then curtailed because of what has just

happened to the last of the raiding parties (v.23), but now it leads to a full-blown invasion.

II.f.i 2 Kings 6:24-7:2 - Ben-hadad's Siege of Samaria

This passage describes the terrible price of human suffering during a siege. Because of the severe famine in the besieged city of Samaria, two women agree to cook and eat their own children. One woman complains to the king that they had cooked and eaten her child but the other woman had then hidden her own child so it could not be eaten. The king blamed Elisha for the situation and sent men to arrest him but Elisha prophesied that the siege would be lifted within 24 hours.

²⁴ Some time later King Ben-hadad of Aram mustered his entire army; he marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. ²⁵ As the siege continued, famine in Samaria became so great that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver.

2 Kings 6:24-25

Some time later King Ben-hadad of Aram mustered his entire army; he marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. Although the compassion of Elisha and the king of Israel changed the heart of the Aramæan raiders, it did not change the heart of the king of Syria. He launched a large, full-scale attack against his neighbour to the south. He used the common method of attack in those days of securely walled cities: he besieged Samaria. A siege was intended to surround a city, prevent all business and trade from entering or leaving the city, and to eventually starve the population into surrender.

A donkey's head; a kab of dove's dung. Donkeys were commonly found among the domestic animals in Syria and Palestine, and various OT laws identify them as significant possessions, e.g. Exodus 13:13, 20:17 and 22:4. So severe was the siege that the inhabitants of Samaria were reduced not only to slaughtering and eating valuable animals, but also to consuming body parts that would not normally be consumed, and purchasing them for exorbitant prices; for example, the cost of a live horse in 1 Kings 10:29 is only 150 shekels of silver, and here a donkey's head costs eighty. During this crisis even half a litre, a one-fourth part of a kab, of dove's dung cost what the average worker could make in six months, that is, five shekels of silver.

One commentator writes that dove's dung is better translated as carob beans, which in the context of food would make more sense. However, another explains that Dove's excrement would actually contain a lot of nourishment.

Such scenes were not uncommon in times of siege. When Hannibal besieged Casiline a mouse was sold for an extortionate price and meals made of dog's intestines were also sold during the siege of Scodra, now Shkodër in Albania.

²⁶ Now as the king of Israel was walking on the city wall, a woman cried out to him, 'Help, my lord king!' ²⁷ He said, 'No! Let the Lord help you. How can I help you? From the threshing-floor or from the wine press?'

2 Kings 6:26-27

Help, my lord king! The plea is directed to the king as the ultimate court of human justice, as in 1 Kings 3:16-28, but Israel has strayed a long way from that glorious era when a wise king could ensure justice. The normal food supply is exhausted; nothing comes from the threshing-floor, (refer to the comment made on 1 Kings 22:10-12), or the winepress, a flat, hard surface on which grapes could be trodden, with the juice running off into a reservoir and then being poured into large jars for fermentation.

²⁸ But then the king asked her, 'What is your complaint?' She answered, 'This woman said to me, "Give up your son; we will eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow." ²⁹ So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, "Give up your son and we will eat him." But she has hidden her son.'

2 Kings 6:28-29

Give up your son and we will eat him. This shows how terrible the famine was. Mothers were so hungry that they ate their own children. Scripture contains an extended section where God warned Israel about the curses that would come upon them if they rejected the covenant he had made with them. Part of that chapter describes the horrors fulfilled in this chapter: <<*It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout your land; it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout the land that the Lord your God has given you. In the desperate straits to which the enemy siege reduces you, you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your own sons and daughters whom the Lord your God has given you*>> (Deuteronomy 28:52-53). These terrors came upon Israel because they had disobeyed and rejected God, and had abandoned the covenant that he had made with them.

The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal also reports that, during his two-year siege of Babylon, which ended in 648 BC, "famine seized them; for their hunger they ate the flesh of their sons and daughters"; the Bible itself reports other

instances of cannibalism arising from a long siege, for example: <<Look, O Lord, and consider! To whom have you done this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have borne? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?>> (Lamentations 2:20), <<The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food in the destruction of my people>> (Lamentations 4:10), and: <<Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents; I will execute judgements on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to every wind>> (Ezekiel 5:10).

³⁰ When the king heard the words of the woman he tore his clothes – now since he was walking on the city wall, the people could see that he had sackcloth on his body underneath – ³¹ and he said, ‘So may God do to me, and more, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his shoulders today.’ ^{32a} So he dispatched a man from his presence.

2 Kings 6:30-32a

He tore his clothes. Refer to the comments made on 2 Kings 2:11-13 where Elisha tore his clothes at the loss of Elijah, and 2 Kings 5:5-7 when King Jehoram tore his clothes when the king of Aram requested that he heal Naaman of his leprosy; wearing sackcloth is also symbolic of mourning and distress. Jehoram appears to believe that removing Elisha will remove the problems he is facing.

So may God do to me, and more, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his shoulders today. The king was deeply grieved and angry but not with himself, with Israel, or with their sin. The king was angry against the prophet of God. The message is very similar to that seen earlier although it was one that was much more personal to Queen Jezebel for Elijah had slaughtered her priests of Baal: <<Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow’>> (1 Kings 19:2). In essence, the king was making an oath before the Lord and therefore it was binding: <<When a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth>> (Numbers 30:2).

^{32b} Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, ‘Are you aware that this murderer has sent someone to take off my head? When the messenger comes, see that you shut the door and hold it closed against him. Is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?’ ³³ While he was still speaking with them, the king came down to him and said,

‘This trouble is from the Lord! Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?’

2 Kings 6:32b-33

The elders were sitting with him. As the company of prophets seem to have gathered to listen to their lead prophet in Chapter 4, so here the elders of Samaria are gathered together in Elisha’s house. Unlike the king, they no doubt sought his wise council as to what to do in their situation. There are similar scenarios: <<*In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there*>> (Ezekiel 8:1), and: <<*In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain elders of Israel came to consult the Lord, and sat down before me*>> (Ezekiel 20:1).

This trouble is from the Lord! Why should I hope in the Lord any longer? The king of Israel was honest enough to admit that his real anger was against the Lord.

^{7:1} But Elisha said, ‘Hear the word of the Lord: thus says the Lord, Tomorrow about this time a measure of choice meal shall be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria.’

2 Kings 7:1

Hear the word of the Lord. Although the king of Israel blamed the Lord for the calamity that came upon Israel and Samaria, God still had a word for the king and the nation and it was a good word.

Tomorrow about this time. God’s promise through Elisha was that in 24 hours the economic situation in Samaria would be completely reversed. The king would have to wait no longer: salvation was imminent, and normal business at the gate of Samaria would be resumed on the following day; note that the prices are much lower here than in v.25.

The open area inside city gates served various important social purposes in ancient times. Among other things, agricultural activities took place and business was transacted there: <<*Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city*>> (Genesis 23:10), and: <<*So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city*>> (Genesis 34:20). Instead of scarcity, there would be such abundance that food prices would radically drop in the city. By the standards of that time, the prices listed were not cheap; but they were nothing compared to the famine conditions associated with the siege. By the next day conditions would

improve significantly and good products would be available again, even though at a substantial price compared with the days before the siege.

A measure of choice meal or fine flour; two measures of barley. A measure is literally a *seah* and was 7.7 litres by volume.

7:2 Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned said to the man of God, ‘Even if the Lord were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?’ But he said, ‘You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it.’

2 Kings 7:2

Even if the Lord were to make windows in the sky or windows in heaven. It is impossible for this officer to imagine how such an economic recovery could happen overnight, in the aftermath of such a terrible siege. Will God hand out unexpected material blessings through the windows of his heavenly storehouse: <<**Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven**>> (Psalm 78:23), and: <<**Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing**>> (Malachi 3:10)? To mock the prophetic word is to mock the Lord himself, however, so the doubting officer shall see it but not eat it.

The king’s officer doubted the prophecy, and his doubt was based on several faulty premises:

- First, he doubted the power of God. If God willed it, he certainly could make windows in heaven and drop down food from the sky for the hungry, besieged city of Samaria. He had clearly forgotten how God had supplied his people with manna for forty years in the wilderness.
- Second, he doubted the creativity of God. In the mind of the king’s officer, the way food could come to the city was from above, because the city was surrounded by a hostile, besieging army. He had no idea that God could bring provision in a completely unexpected way. How often faith breaks down in this way! It knows who God is, and that he can act. However, it only sees one way, and refuses to believe that such a way will be taken. The supply came without the opening of heavens windows.
- Third, he doubted the messenger of God. Although the promise was admittedly hard to believe, the king’s officer could have and should have believed it because it came from a man with an established track record of reliability.

All in all, the officer well illustrates the conduct of unbelief:

- Unbelief dares to question the truthfulness of God's promise itself.
- Unbelief says, "This is a new thing and cannot be true."
- Unbelief says, "This is a sudden thing and cannot be true."
- Unbelief says, "There is no way to accomplish this thing."
- Unbelief says, "There is only one way God can work."
- Unbelief says, "Even if God does something, it will not be enough."

You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it. Through Elisha, God pronounced a harsh judgement upon the king's doubting officer. He would see the word fulfilled, but not benefit from its fulfilment.

Spurgeon comments, "Unbelievers do not really enjoy the things of this life. The mass of them find that wealth does not yield them satisfaction; their outward riches cannot conceal their inner poverty. To many men it is given to have all that heart can wish, and yet not to have what their heart does wish. They have everything except contentment."