



Second Kings - Chapter Seven

- II [2 Kings 2:1-10:36 - Elisha and Israel \(continues\)](#)
- II.f [2 Kings 6:24-7:20 - War at Samaria \(continues/concludes\)](#)
- II.f.i [2 Kings 6:24-7:2 - Ben-hadad's Siege of Samaria \(continues/concludes\)](#)

Summary of Chapter Seven

Having prophesied the unlikely reversal of the siege of Samaria, four lepers living outside the camp and starving decided to go to the Aramæan camp, which they find deserted. They eat and drink their fill and then take away valuables to hide for themselves. They then realise that this is good news that they must share with city so they return and report it to the gatekeepers, who inform the king. He suspects a trap and sends out men to see if the Aramæans are preparing to entrap them but they find that the army has indeed fled. Therefore, the city is opened for the people to go to the camp and retrieve the much needed food which is then sold at the prices prophesied by Elisha. In addition, the officer who had doubted the word of the Lord was trampled to death in the gate, also fulfilling Elisha's word.

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.

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."

II.f.ii. 2 Kings 7:3-20 - The Aramæans Flee

Refer to the chapter summary above.

³ Now there were four leprous men outside the city gate, who said to one another, 'Why should we sit here until we die?' ⁴ If we say, "Let us enter the city", the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; but if

we sit here, we shall also die. Therefore, let us desert to the Aramæan camp; if they spare our lives, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.’⁵ So they arose at twilight to go to the Aramæan camp; but when they came to the edge of the Aramæan camp, there was no one there at all.

2 Kings 7:3-5

Now there were four leprous men outside the city gate. A leper called Naaman had first brought the Aramæans to Samaria during Jehoram’s reign in 2 Kings 5:1-7, and four men with a similar ailment now drive them away. These men stayed at the entrance of the gate because they were not welcome in the city. Their leprous condition made them outcasts and untouchables. Faced with certain death if they enter the city or sit where they are, they instead choose possible death in the Aramæan camp. Their logic was perfect. They would soon die from the famine if they stayed near the city. If any food became available, they would certainly be the last to receive it, if at all. So they decided that their chances were better if they surrendered to the Aramæans.

Unfounded Jewish traditions states that these four were actually Elisha’s former servant Gehazi and his three sons. Gehazi was afflicted with leprosy because of his greed in asking Namaan for gifts that Elisha had declined to accept; refer to 2 Kings 5:27.

Charles Spurgeon makes a valid point concerning such people as these lepers, “If you were to take out of the Scriptures all the stories that have to do with poor, afflicted men and women, what a very small book the Bible would become, especially if together with the stories you removed all the psalms of the sorrowful, all the promises for the distressed, and all the passages which belong to the children of grief! This Book, indeed, for the most part is made up of the annals of the poor and despised.”

But when they came to the edge of the Aramæan camp, there was no one there at all. This huge army had surrounded the city of Samaria for many months, and their camp was the home and supply centre for thousands of men. When the lepers came upon it that morning, they discovered an empty army camp fully supplied, but with no soldiers. The Hebrew translated to the edge of the Aramæan camp implies that they came not only to the edge of the camp, but that they walked around it to the furthest part, the side away from the city. They came to the camp as someone from afar would approach, not as someone from Aram. The lepers probably surmised that this was their best chance, coming as if they were not from the besieged city and to the least fortified positions of the camp.

This approach of the lepers to the camp may provide the occasion for the miracle itself; perhaps the Lord had in some way magnified the stumbling footsteps of the men as they made their way around the camp's opposite end.

⁶ For the Lord had caused the Aramæan army to hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, 'The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to fight against us.' ⁷ So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses, and their donkeys, leaving the camp just as it was, and fled for their lives. ⁸ When these leprous men had come to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent, ate and drank, carried off silver, gold, and clothing, and went and hid them. Then they came back, entered another tent, carried off things from it, and went and hid them.

2 Kings 7:6-8

For the Lord had caused the Aramæan army to hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army. Israel was powerless against this besieging army, but God was not powerless. He attacked the Aramæan army simply by causing them to hear the noise of an army. Perhaps God did this by putting the noise into the air; perhaps he simply created the perception of the noise in the minds of the Aramæan soldiers. However God did it, it happened. The same God who struck one Aramæan army so they could not see what was before them now struck another Aramæan army so that they heard things that were not there.

When the Egyptians followed the Israelites through the Red Sea, the Lord threw that army into confusion: <<At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic>> (Exodus 14:24), and even a small number of angels can sound like a mighty army: <<When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army; when they stopped, they let down their wings>> (Ezekiel 1:24).

The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to fight against us. It was common practice for one king to hire the armies of neighbouring states to fight on their behalf, for example: <<When the Ammonites saw that they had become odious to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Aramæans of Beth-rehob and the Aramæans of Zobah, twenty thousand foot-soldiers, as well as the king of Maacah, one thousand men, and the men of Tob, twelve thousand men>> (2 Samuel 10:6).

The kings of Egypt. Perhaps the four lepers (Hebrew *metsora'im*), seen in the twilight (v.5), are mistaken for a mercenary army drawn from northern Syria and from Egypt (Hebrew *Mitsrayim*); the Lord may have been using their approach as part of the delusion along with the sounds of an army.

So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses, and their donkeys, leaving the camp just as it was, and fled for their lives.

Everything was left behind, leaving the unlikely lepers to take spoil from the camp. As a result, the siege for Samaria was over even though no one in the city knew it or enjoyed it. This phenomenon is reminiscent of the Midianite rout by Gideon with just a handful of men: <<*Every man stood in his place all around the camp, and all the men in camp ran; they cried out and fled*>> (Judges 7:21). This is what becomes of people who do not rely on God: <<*For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you refused and said, 'No! We will flee upon horses' – therefore you shall flee! and, 'We will ride upon swift steeds' – therefore your pursuers shall be swift! A thousand shall flee at the threat of one, at the threat of five you shall flee, until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill*>> (Isaiah 30:15-17).

They went into a tent, ate and drank, carried off silver, gold, and clothing, and went and hid them. Of course they did. After the long period of famine, this was the answer to every hope and prayer they had. They knew that their discovery of the camp could not remain secret forever and that they would not be permitted there once others came, so they hid some of the valuables that they may profit by them even after the camp was discovered by others.

⁹ Then they said to one another, 'What we are doing is wrong. This is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, we will be found guilty; therefore let us go and tell the king's household.'

2 Kings 7:9

What we are doing is wrong. Therefore let us go and tell the king's household.

The lepers rightly enjoyed the miracle God had provided. However, they also realised that the gift gave them a responsibility to share it with others. They understood that to remain silent and to selfishly enjoy their blessings would be sinful and despite their own affliction, they knew what they must do. They had a responsibility to share the good news. This is, of course, what Christians are called to do - to share the Gospel of Christ rather than to keep it to themselves.

¹⁰ So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and told them, 'We went to the Aramæan camp, but there was no one to be seen or heard there, nothing but the horses tied, the donkeys tied, and

the tents as they were.’¹¹ Then the gatekeepers called out and proclaimed it to the king’s household.¹² The king got up in the night, and said to his servants, ‘I will tell you what the Aramæans have prepared against us. They know that we are starving; so they have left the camp to hide themselves in the open country, thinking, “When they come out of the city, we shall take them alive and get into the city.”’¹³ One of his servants said, ‘Let some men take five of the remaining horses, since those left here will suffer the fate of the whole multitude of Israel that have perished already; let us send and find out.’¹⁴ So they took two mounted men, and the king sent them after the Aramæan army, saying, ‘Go and find out.’¹⁵ So they went after them as far as the Jordan; the whole way was littered with garments and equipment that the Aramæans had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned, and told the king.

2 Kings 7:10-15

So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city. Since the lepers were not welcome in the city, they could only communicate with the gatekeepers from outside the walls. There were many people they could not speak to, but they were faithful to speak to the ones whom they could speak to.

Then the gatekeepers called out and proclaimed it to the king’s household. The good news from the lepers was communicated in the simplest way possible. It went from one person to another, until the news reached the king himself.

Let some men take five of the remaining horses; let us send and find out. This was the sensible reaction to the good news that started with the report of the lepers. The report might be true or it might not be; it only made sense to test it and see: *<<but test everything; hold fast to what is good>>* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Only two mounted men were sent. Perhaps they took with them three spare horses, or one spare horse if the horsemen took two chariots, each having two horses.

¹⁶ Then the people went out, and plundered the camp of the Aramæans. So a measure of choice meal was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

2 Kings 7:16

Then the people went out, and plundered the camp of the Aramæans. When the good news that started with the report of the lepers was found to be true, there was no stopping the people: *<<Spoil was gathered as the caterpillar gathers; as*

locusts leap, they leapt upon it>> (Isaiah 33:4). Because they knew their need, they were happy to receive God's provision to meet that need: <<*Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided; even the lame will fall to plundering*>> (Isaiah 33:23b).

According to the word of the Lord. Through Elisha, God announced the exact prices in the Samarian markets, and the prophecy was proven to be precisely true.

¹⁷ Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate; the people trampled him to death in the gate, just as the man of God had said when the king came down to him.

¹⁸ For when the man of God had said to the king, 'Two measures of barley shall be sold for a shekel, and a measure of choice meal for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria', ¹⁹ the captain had answered the man of God, 'Even if the Lord were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?' And he had answered, 'You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it.' ²⁰ It did indeed happen to him; the people trampled him to death in the gate.

2 Kings 7:17-20

Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. Perhaps the king did this to rebuke his officer or it may have been that he wanted a trustworthy officer to oversee what was going on and to maintain order. The man would have to personally supervise the people responding to the provision which he said could never come because he could not understand how God could bring the supply despite the siege.

The people trampled him to death in the gate. The sceptical officer of v.2, ironically stationed at the very gate at which he had anticipated seeing no trade, is trampled in the scramble to acquire food and drink, fulfilling Elisha's prophecy.