

2 Kings Chapter 8

Verses 1-6: The Lord brought “famine” to punish Israel’s sin. But in His mercy, He spared the Shunammite woman who had been kind to Elisha (4:8-37). Based on the details given (“went forth to cry ... for her house and for her land”), she was probably now a widow. King Jehoram administered justice and kindness, unlike King Ahab in a similar situation (1 Kings 21:1-16).

2 Kings 8:1 "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."

“A famine ... seven years”: Seven-year famines were known in the ancient Near East (Gen. 41:29-32). Since the Shunammite woman would have been only a resident alien in a foreign land, her return within 7 years may have aided her legal claim to her property (Exodus 21:2; 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7; Deut. 15:1-6).

This Shunammite woman had befriended Elisha on several occasions. He had prayed, and God had brought her son back to life on one occasion. He knew the 7 year famine that would come upon the land. He went to his friend, and told her to take her family out of the land before the famine begins. The famine in Egypt, at the time of Joseph, had been for 7 years as well. It seems, a severe famine lasts 7 years.

2 Kings 8:2 "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."

“Land of the Philistines”: The area located southwest of Israel along the Mediterranean Sea coastal plain between the Jarkon River in the north and the Besor Brook in the south. The fact that the famine was localized in Israel demonstrated that this was a curse, a punishment for apostasy (Deut. 28:38-40), because of Israel’s disobedience of the Mosaic Covenant.

This woman does not doubt what the prophet Elisha has told her. She immediately does exactly as the prophet has told her to do. She knows that Elisha spoke as an oracle of God. She chose the land of the Philistines, because they were less subject to famine. Grain was plentiful there, and there was much water there as well. She was a woman of means, so she could move fairly easily.

2 Kings 8:3 "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."

“Cry unto the king”: The Shunammite woman made a legal appeal to the king to support her ownership claim. In Israel, the king was the final arbiter of such disputes (see note on 1 Kings 3:16-27). Providentially, the widow arrived just as Gehazi was describing how Elisha had raised her son from the dead (verse 5).

She had not sold her land, but had left it to find safety for her family. When she came back after the seven years, it seems someone had tried to claim her place. She had gone to the king to judge on the matter.

Verses 4-6: The Lord had sovereignly arranged the circumstances so that as the king's curiosity concerning "Elisha" was being satisfied by "Gehazi," the needs of the lady from Shunem could be met. How often the Lord weaves together the little threads of the believer's life for God's glory and the believer's good.

2 Kings 8:4 "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."

Elisha's servant, just at the same time the woman made her application to him. So that this was before he was dismissed from the service of the prophet, and consequently before the affair of Naaman's cure, and so before the siege of Samaria.

"Saying, tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done": The miracles he wrought, as the dividing of the waters of Jordan, and healing those near Jericho. The affair of procuring water for the armies of the three kings in Edom he needed not to relate, since Jehoram was an eyewitness thereof. The next was the multiplying the widow's cruse of oil, when he in course came to those that were done for the Shunammite woman.

This particular account was while Gehazi was still in good standing with Elisha. Later on, Gehazi becomes a leper because of his greed and lying. The king perhaps, had not heard much of the miracles Elisha had done, and who would be better to tell him of them than his closest servant?

2 Kings 8:5 "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."

Which was the Shunammite's son.

"That, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life cried to the king for her house, and for her land": Came and presented her petition to the king at that very instant.

"And Gehazi said, my lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life": The very person I am speaking of.

Of course the greatest miracle that Gehazi had seen Elisha do, was the restoration of life to the young boy. God arranged that at the very moment he is telling of this miracle, the woman, who it happened to, would enter. She will confirm the fact, that this miracle really did take place.

2 Kings 8:6 "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 day that she left the land, even until now."

“Restore all . . . all the fruits”: The king’s judgment was to return to the woman everything she owned, including the land’s earnings during her absence.

Not only did she have the opportunity to tell the king of the miracles of Elisha, but the king believed her about her claim for her land, and she was restored her property as well.

Verses 7-15: This illness would not kill “Ben-hadad”, but he also would not escape death for long. That Elisha “settled his countenance steadfastly” suggests a rigid facial expression characteristic of a trance associated with giving a prophetic oracle. Elisha supernaturally discerned the murder plot that was in Hazael’s heart.

2 Kings 8:7 "And Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither."

“Elisha came to Damascus”: It was unusual for a prophet to visit foreign capitals, but not unknown (Jonah 3:3). Elisha went to Damascus, the capital of Syria, to carry out one of the 3 commands God had given to Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19:15-16).

“Ben-hadad” (see note on 1 Kings 15:18). Ben-hadad died 841 B.C., the same year as Jehoram of Israel (3:1), Jehoram of Judah (8:17), and Ahaziah of Judah (8:25-26).

“Man of God” (see note on Deut. 33:1).

We are not told why Elisha came to Damascus. We can safely assume the LORD sent him. He might have been having trouble in Samaria at this time, but I would assume, it was to meet Hazael. Ben-hadad, king of Syria, is sick. Everyone in Syria knew of the miracles that Elisha had performed in the past. The king will surely try to get help from Elisha.

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

“Hazael”: His name means “God sees” or “who God beholds.” Hazael was a servant of Ben-hadad and not a member of the royal family. Assyrian records called Hazael the “son of a nobody” and his lineage was not recorded because he was a commoner.

We know that before the ascension of Elijah into heaven, the LORD had told him to anoint Hazael as king of Syria. If he did that, it was long before the opportunity arose for Hazael to be king. It was Hazael that Ben-hadad sent to inquire of Elisha, if he would live over this sickness?

2 Kings 8:9 "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 Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

“Every good thing of Damascus”: The city of Damascus was a trade center between Egypt, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia. It had within it the finest merchandise of the ancient Near East. Ben-hadad evidently thought that an impressive gift would influence Elisha’s prediction.

“Thy son”: Ben-hadad approached Elisha with the humble respect of a son for his father (5:13; 6:21).

Elisha was not the father of Ben-hadad. This was a way of showing the honor due Elisha from Ben-hadad. This gift, that he sent, was tremendous. The gift consisted of gold, and silver, and expensive clothing, just like the offering that Naaman had brought earlier for his cleansing from leprosy. He wanted Elisha to tell him, if the sickness he had was fatal or not.

2 Kings 8:10 "And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath showed me that he shall surely die."

“Recover ... die’: Ben-hadad wanted to know whether or not he would recover from his present illness. In response, Elisha affirmed two interrelated things:

1. Ben-hadad would be restored to health; his present sickness would not be the means of his death;
2. Ben-hadad would surely die by some other means.

It appears, that the king is going to die. Hazael would probably not want to tell the king that. Elisha just says, "If you want to, go and tell him he will live, but he will die".

2 Kings 8:11 "And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept."

“He was ashamed”: With a fixed gaze, Elisha started at Hazael because it had been revealed to him what Hazael would do, including the murder of Ben-hadad (verse 15). Hazael was embarrassed, knowing that Elisha knew of his plan to assassinate the Syrian king.

This is speaking of Elisha. When he could control his feelings no longer, he began to weep.

2 Kings 8:12 "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."

Such barbaric actions were not unknown in the ancient Near East (Hosea 13:16; Amos 1:13). “Hazael” would indeed perpetrate these 3 shameful practices (10:32; 13:3-7, 22).

“The evil”: Elisha mourned, knowing the atrocities that Hazael would bring on Israel. The harsh actions mentioned here were common in ancient wars (Psalm 137:9; Isa. 13:16; Hosea 10:14; 13:16; Amos 1:13; Nah. 3:10). Hazael did prove to be a constant foe of Israel (9:14-16; 10:32; 12:17-18; 13:3, 22).

Hazael appeared to be concerned about Elisha, but he was not interested in anyone, except himself. We must stop and take note that even an evil king like Hazael, was king because God put him in power. Wars in this region of the world, were bloody cruel wars where all of the things Elisha mentioned above are commonplace. They did not have human feelings toward their enemies or their families.

Verses 13-15: For the “dog” as a symbol of abasement or contempt (see 1 Sam. 24:14; 2 Sam. 9:8; 16:9). Perhaps “Elisha” had been appointed to fulfill Elijah’s commission to anoint the Aramean Ben-hadad’s demise previously and used Elisha’s prophecy as a pretext for his crime. Elisha had foreseen his evil deeds. Hazael’s usurpation does not pass without notice in the secular records of the ancient Near East. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III called him “son of a nobody” (i.e., a usurper). Hazael reigned from around 841 to 801 B.C. and was a constant enemy of Israel.

2 Kings 8:13 "And Hazael said, But what, [is] thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath showed me that thou [shalt be] king over Syria."

“Thy servant a dog”: To call oneself a dog was an expression of humility (see note on 2 Sam. 9:8). Hazael sought to deny that he would ever have the power to commit such atrocities. He was trying to convince Elisha that he had no plan to take over the kingship of Syria.

“Thou shalt be king over Syria”: In response to Hazael’s feigned self-deprecation, Elisha affirmed that the Lord willed that Hazael be king over Aram, or Syria (1 Kings 19:15).

At the time that Elisha said this, Hazael did not even know that he would be king. To call someone a dog, was about the lowest name you could call them. Hazael denies that he would act like a dog, if he became king. Elisha reminds him that the LORD showed him Hazael as king, and the kind of king he would be.

2 Kings 8:14 "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."

Benhadad king of Syria.

"Who said to him, what said Elisha to thee? Concerning his recovery, which was the thing uppermost in his mind, and he was eagerly desirous to know how it would be.

"And he answered, he told me that thou shouldest surely recover": Which was false; for he only said that he "might", and not that he should. And he concealed what he also declared, that though he might recover of his disease, yet that he should surely die in another way.

He told the king what he wanted to hear. We are not told, whether Elisha accepted the camels with all the gifts on them or not. We do know that he gave Hazael a different answer, than the one he gave Ben-hadad.

2 Kings 8:15 "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."

"He died": Hazael took a bed furnishing, soaked it, and killed Ben-hadad by suffocation.

"Hazael reigned in his stead": Upon Ben-hadad's death, Hazael took the kingship of Syria and ruled 841-801 B.C., during the reigns of Jehoram, Jehu, and Jehoahaz in Israel and Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Joash in Judah.

This to me, is saying that Hazael suffocated Ben-hadad to death. This makes the answer that Elisha gave a little more understandable. Ben-hadad would have recovered from his illness, had not Hazael suffocated him with the wet pillow over his face. Hazael was next in line to become king.

Verses 16-18: Now both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel were ruled by a king named Jehoram ("Yahweh Is Exalted").

"Joram" (a shortened form of the name) ruled the northern kingdom, "Israel", 852-841 B.C.; "Jehoram" ruled the southern kingdom, "Judah," 848-841 B.C.

2 Kings 8:16 "And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat [being] then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign."

"Jehoram" became co-regent with his father Jehoshaphat (see the note on 1:17).

"Fifth year": Ca. 848 B.C., the year Jehoshaphat of Judah died.

This is on an entirely different subject here. The rule of the kings of Syria are dropped, and now, this reflects back to the rule of the kings in Judah. There were two kings named Joram, or Jehoram. One ruled in Israel, and one in Judah. It is very strange that Israel would have a king by the same name as the king of Judah, at the same time. Jehoram of Judah married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. He did not follow in the footsteps of his father Jehoshaphat, who did right in the sight of God. Both Jehoram of Judah and Jehoram of Israel, were very evil.

2 Kings 8:17 "Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem."

“Eight years”: 848-841 B.C. (see notes on 2 Chron. 21:4-20). Jehoram of Judah served as co-regent with his father Jehoshaphat for the final 4 years of his reign, 853-848 B.C. Joram (Jehoram), became king of Israel during the second year of this co-regency, 852 B.C., (see notes on 1:17; 3:1). Jehoram of Judah ruled alone for 8 years after his father’s death, until 841 B.C. (2 Chron. 21:15). Most likely, Obadiah prophesied during his reign.

This Jehoram (Joram), of Judah, reigned until he was 40 years old.

2 Kings 8:18 "And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the LORD."

Jehoram’s sins included the murder of his own brother (2 Chron. 21:2-4). The influence of Athaliah may be felt in this (11:1), for Jehoram was greatly influenced by his wicked wife, who was the daughter of “Ahab” and Jezebel. Therefore, the Lord sent judgment against Jehoram and Judah in the form of several political and military problems (2 Chron. 21:8-17). He himself died of a loathsome disease (2 Chron. 21:18-19).

“The house of Ahab”: Jehoram officially sanctioned Baal worship in Judah as Ahab had in Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33).

“The daughter of Ahab”: Jehoram was married to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (verse 26). Just as Jezebel incited Ahab to do evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Kings 21:25), so Athaliah influenced Jehoram. Athaliah’s wicked actions are recorded (in 11:1-16; 2 Chron. 22:10 - 23:15).

Jehoram no doubt hoped that marrying the “daughter” of a king of Israel would help ease tensions between Judah and Israel; instead, Athaliah led Jehoram to repeat the sins of her father, Ahab” (2 Chron. 21:6). Politically expedient actions can be spiritually disastrous.

He brought the worship of Baal and Astarte to Judah. Probably, his evil wife brought them with her. Her mother Jezebel, and her father Ahab, had introduced the worship of these false deities in Israel. This wife's name was Athaliah, and she was just as evil as her mother.

2 Kings 8:19 "Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give him always a light, [and] to his children."

God kept His covenant promises to maintain a remnant of Israel (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Psalm 89:30-37). This eternal promise would be ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, the descendant of David and the Light of the World (Matt. 1:1; John 1:1-13; 8:12).

“Always a light” (see note on 1 Kings 11:36).

The Lord’s faithfulness to the Davidic covenant remained despite the king’s debased character (see the note on 2 Sam. 7:12-16).

We see the only reason God did not destroy Judah, was because of his promise to David. There would always be a glimmer of the Light of the LORD in Judah.

2 Kings 8:20 "In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves."

“Edom revolted”: Edom had been a vassal of the united kingdom, and of the southern kingdom of Judah since David’s reign (2 Sam. 8:13-14).

Edom was the land that Esau settled so many years ago. Edom was an enemy of God's people continuously. They were constantly breaking away from Judah, and proclaiming their freedom. This is just one more time, when they did that very thing.

2 Kings 8:21 "So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him: and he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about, and the captains of the chariots: and the people fled into their tents."

A city in Edom, the same with the Zaara of Ptolemy. Some take it to be the same with Seir, the mountain or country of that name.

"And all the chariots with him": All the chariots of war he had.

"And he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about": Who came out of their cities in great numbers, and surrounded him, he having entered into their country in a hostile way, to subdue them.

"And the captains of the chariots": Which belonged to the Edomites; those he smote (2 Chron. 21:9).

"And the people fled into their tents”: The army being routed.

“Zair”: The exact location is unknown.

Joram is the same as Jehoram. He fought with the Edomites, to keep them from gaining their freedom from Judah.

2 Kings 8:22 "Yet Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time."

“Edom revolted . . . unto this day”: During the reign of Jehoram, Edom defeated the Judean army, took some border lands, and became independent of Judah’s’ rule. The continuing sovereignty of Edom proved that none of the future kings of Judah recorded in 2 Kings was the anticipated Messiah because He would possess Edom (Num. 24:18).

“Libnah”: A town located in the Shephelah on the border with Philistia, about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem (Joshua 15:42; 21:13). The revolt of Libnah was probably connected with that of the Philistines and Arabians recounted (in 2 Chron. 21:16-17).

Israel’s conflicts with “Edom” were often accompanied by Philistine pressure on her western border (2 Chron. 21:16; 26:6-7; 28:17-19; Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:6-8).

The battle of Jehoram was not effective. They still revolted. Libnah was near Philistia. They took advantage of the revolt of Edom and revolted too.

2 Kings 8:23 "And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, [are] they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?"

Not in the canonical book of Chronicles, though some of his acts are recorded there (see 2 Chron. 21:1). But in the annals of the kings of Judah, written by persons appointed for that purpose.

2 Kings 8:24 "And Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead."

But not in the sepulchers of the kings, and without any funeral pomp, and without any mourning and lamentation for him. He being not beloved, and his life not at all desirable (2 Chron. 21:19).

"And Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead": Of whom more is said in the following verses.

This is that same book of records that is not in the Bible. He was buried in the city of David. His very evil son, Ahaziah, who was the grandson of Jezebel and Ahab, reigned in his stead. Ahaziah was also called Azariah and Jehoahaz.

Verses 25-29: The reign of Ahaziah (841 B.C.) is not to be confused with that of Israel’s King Ahaziah (1 Kings 22:51 – 2 Kings 1:8; see notes on 2 Kings 9:27; 2 Chron. 22:1-9).

2 Kings 8:25 "In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign."

“Ahaziah” had escaped the earlier Philistine and Arabian invasions (2 Chron. 21:16-17). He remained under the influence of Athaliah’s paganism (2 Chron. 22:3-5).

I suppose, it is giving the name of the king of Israel, when each person is king of Judah, to show who they had to deal with during their reign. Ahaziah, probably was acting king during the two years of his father's illness. At his death, he became sole ruler.

2 Kings 8:26 "Two and twenty years old [was] Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name [was] Athaliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel."

“Athaliah” is called the “daughter of Omri”. Thus her descent by marriage is linked to the founder of Israel’s Third Dynasty, Omri, the father of Ahab. For Ahaziah’s age at this accession (see the note on 2 Chron. 22:2 and here on verse 18).

His mother's father was actually Ahab. Omri was her grandfather. The name "Athaliah" means whom Jehovah hath afflicted. Omri was prominent, because he did a great deal to establish the ten tribes as separate Israel.

2 Kings 8:27 "And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, as [did] the house of Ahab: for he [was] the son in law of the house of Ahab."

“The house of Ahab”: Like his father, Jehoram, Ahaziah continued the official sanctioning of Baal worship in Judah (see note on verse 18).

This is speaking of him carrying on the worship of Baal in Judah. He was a relative of Ahab. His mother was the daughter of Ahab.

2 Kings 8:28 "And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram."

Another Aramean/Israelite “war” at “Ramoth-gilead” again spells disaster for Israel (1 Kings 22:35-36).

“Ramoth-gilead” (see note on 1 Kings 22:3).

2 Kings 8:29 "And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick."

“Went down to see Joram”: Ahaziah’s travel to visit the recuperating Joram (also called Jehoram) king of Israel placed him in Jezreel (west of the Jordan, southwest of the Sea of Galilee), during Jehu’s purge of the house of Omri (see 9:21-29).

His father and his uncle both, were named Joram or Jehoram. It would be a likely thing for these close relatives to join forces in battle against a mutual enemy. We remember, that Hazael was unusually wicked. He called himself a dog, when Elisha told him of what he would do. Ramoth-gilead was in the hands of Israel at the time of this war. Hazael was the aggressor then. His uncle, Joram, was wounded in the battle, but it was not a fatal wound. It appears that he and his uncle left the battlefield in the hands of capable captains, and went home to their capitals. It appears, from this, that Ahaziah actually took Joram, king of Israel, to Jezreel to be healed, before he went home to his own capital.

2 Kings Chapter 8 Questions

1. Elisha warned the Shunammite woman of a _____.
2. How long will the famine last?
3. Where did she take her family, until the famine was over.
4. She knows that Elisha speaks as an _____ of God.
5. Why did she choose the land of the Philistines?
6. After the 7 year famine, what did the woman do?
7. Who was the king speaking with, when she came to him?
8. What had the king asked him?
9. Gehazi told him of what miracle?
10. What did Gehazi tell the king that helped get her land back for her?
11. In verse 7, where did Elisha go?
12. Who was sick?
13. Who did Ben-hadad send to inquire of Elisha?
14. What did the king want to know?
15. How large was the gift he brought to Elisha?
16. What did Elisha tell Hazael to say?
17. Why did the man of God weep?
18. What does Hazael call himself in verse 13?
19. How did Elisha know of the evil he would do?
20. How did Ben-hadad really die?
21. What two kingdoms had a king named Joram, or Jehoram?
22. Jehoram of Judah reigned, until he was _____ years old.
23. What was the only reason God did not destroy Judah?
24. Who revolted from Judah?

25. How old was Ahaziah, when he began to reign?
26. What kind of a king was he?
27. Who did Hazael war against at Ramoth-gilead?
28. Who was wounded in battle, and taken to Jezreel to heal?