

Week 15: *The Shunammite Woman's Land Is Restored; Hazael Becomes King of Aram – 2 Kings 8:1–15*

Hook



Main Point: The Lord orchestrates all things to work together for His plan and purposes.

Q: From your experience, what is the saddest commercial, television episode, movie or book?

Q: Is there a particular moment or scene that makes you cry every time?

Are you a crier? Research suggests that women cry 3.5 times on average per month and men shed tears 1.9 times in the same time frame. Described as “emotional tears,” the crying done in response to a sad stimulus releases oxytocin and endorphins and helps flush out stress hormones.¹

Q: What in life do you find yourself crying over the most?

Q: In your walk with Christ, what brings you to the point of tears?

Tears can reveal what we love, what we fear, and what truly matters to us. In today's passage, we're going to see a man of God brought to tears – not out of some kind of weakness, but because he sees the weight of what's coming, and in doing so, he reflects the very heart of God.

RECAP: In the first lesson, we talked about the role of the Old Testament prophets as God's messengers calling His people to repent and how they pointed ahead to Jesus. In week 2, we saw God's provision for both Elijah and the widow of Zarephath during the drought, which was a consequence of Israel's idolatry. In lesson 3, God raised the widow's son from the dead, which not only showed His sovereign power but also His care for the vulnerable and His heart for all the nations. In lesson 4, we saw God's superiority over other “gods” as Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount

Carmel. In lesson 5, Elijah ran for his life from the wrath of Jezebel and found refuge in the Lord. God spoke to him not in the thunder and lightning but in the still, small voice.

In lesson 6, Elijah called Elisha to succeed him, and Elisha left his old life behind. Then Elijah prophesied the deaths of Jezebel and Ahab but delayed the end of Ahab's dynasty because he repented. Ahab's first son died because he worshipped false gods, and his second son became king. In lesson 7, Elijah was taken up to heaven in the whirlwind, and Elisha took over his ministry with the same Holy Spirit upon him. In lesson 8, we explored exactly what it meant when Elisha asked Elijah for a "double portion" of his spirit. In lessons 9 and 10, God brought judgment on those who rejected His prophets and His message but brought life, healing and blessing to those who came to Him in faith. In lesson 11, God fed the hungry through two miracles, healing the poison in the stew and multiplying food as Jesus did in the New Testament. In lesson 12, Elisha healed a Gentile leper and refused to take his thank-you gift, but his servant took the money instead, and we saw how Elisha responded. In lesson 13, we saw that God has a supernatural heavenly army protecting His people. In lesson 14, we saw the devastating consequences of breaking the covenant come to pass, and Samaria was besieged by the Syrians.

In this lesson, we'll see two things: 1) Elisha tells the Shunammite woman to leave Israel because of a seven-year famine, then God restores her land when she returns, and 2) Ben-Hadad's servant, Hazael, overthrows him as king. Both of these things were revealed to Elisha by God, showing us that Yahweh is the Lord of all the earth and sovereign over all things. He raises up kings and tears them down and orchestrates all things for His plan and purposes.

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Book

Main Point: The Lord orchestrates all things to work together for His plan and purposes.

2 Kings 8:1–6 [Read]

Talking Point 1: We can trust God to bring restoration, healing and new life.

Q: Why did Elisha tell the Shunammite woman to flee? What was the result?

Q: What type of character does the woman show in this story?

Q: Can you think of a time when you saw God bring healing or restoration to your life or someone else's?

This section brings us back to the story of the Shunammite woman who had provided Elisha a room and whose son he raised from the dead. We can tell this story is out of chronological order for two reasons: 1) it says Elisha “had said” referring to something that *had* happened in the past and 2) in this story, Gehazi was still Elisha’s servant, but we know he stopped being Elisha’s servant back in chapter 5. It was very typical for ancient historical narratives to discuss events out of chronological order, to arrange things more theologically instead. This doesn’t make the history inaccurate; it’s just a different method of storytelling from our modern, Western, linear type of thinking.

The author of Kings wasn’t hiding the fact that this is out of chronological order. It’s something that had happened in the past that he was reflecting on now for a theological reason. This story is positioned intentionally between two scenes of intense national crisis. Just before this story (chapters 6–7), Israel faced famine, siege and desperation. Just after this story (8:7–15), Hazael rose to power in Aram, which led to even more oppression for Israel. Right in the middle of national instability and covenant curses for God’s people on a national scale, we have a story of personal restoration. Israel as a nation was spiraling, but this story reminds us that even when the big picture looks bleak and the world feels out of control, God has not stopped caring for individual people who love Him. Ours is the God who sees and hears our pain, struggle and suffering and answers with compassionate care.

The author was also contrasting two different responses to God. The king and his advisors rejected God’s authority and doubted His power. But this relatively insignificant woman listened, obeyed, and trusted. The contrast highlights the results of trusting

God: National unfaithfulness leads to devastation and loss, but personal faith leads to preservation and restoration. By placing this story where it is, Kings draws attention to the providence of God. The “coincidence” of the woman’s arrival to appeal to the king just as Gehazi was speaking with him about her son becomes the focal point of the story. The message is clear: Even when events seem scattered, chaotic or out of order to us, God is orchestrating things with precision, according to His perfect timing.

This account is a small-but-powerful reminder that both loss and restoration ultimately rest in the hands of God. Even the word “restored” as used in the first verse to talk about Elisha’s raising the woman’s son points to the theme of restoration. The story begins with Elisha’s protecting the woman and her family from the coming famine. This was not the same famine in Samaria caused by the siege from the Aramean army. This was a long-term famine across the whole nation. Seven years is a theologically significant amount of time, a full cycle of years according to Old Testament law. The Israelites were supposed to work the land for six years and let it rest for the seventh.² Understanding these famines as separate events actually deepens the message – God is sovereign over all kinds of crises, both natural famine and famine caused by human action like war. We don’t need to be afraid, regardless of the cause of the suffering or struggle in our lives; God is in control.

Through Elisha, God protected the woman from the seven-year famine, but when the famine was over and she returned, she had to appeal to the king to get her house and land back. This reminds us that financial security is never really guaranteed, even for the very rich. It can be taken away in an instant (Proverbs 23:4–5). At any moment, any one of us could experience a personal tragedy such as a job loss or health crisis or a larger scale event such as a stock market crash or an attack on our nation. Those of us who trust in the Lord don’t depend on the fickleness of wealth; we trust in the Lord to provide (Proverbs 11:28; 1 Timothy 6:17).

This story perfectly illustrates that the Lord is the One who provides. The restoration of her land was clearly orchestrated entirely by God. The timing is striking. The king “happened” to be talking to Gehazi, asking him to tell him all the great things Elisha had done. Just as Gehazi was telling about Elisha’s “restoring” life to the Shunammite woman’s son, she appeared before the king to appeal for her house and land back. In the ancient Near East, legal and property matters were typically handled by men as the head of the household. The fact that she was appealing to the king herself leads most scholars to believe her husband had died in the seven years they were gone. It makes sense, because earlier in the story, when Elisha and Gehazi were discussing what could be done to repay her kindness, Gehazi had said her husband was old (4:14). In their culture, she would have been vulnerable to financial instability if he were to die without her having a son. Though God had given her a son, what they had feared had come true. She had lost her home and her land when she left to escape the famine, and now she was a vulnerable widow.

This story reveals the strength of her character, which we saw in the earlier stories about her. She was decisive and proactive; it was she who initiated building the room for Elisha. She was faith-filled and bold; she went straight to Elisha when her son died, knowing he could help. Now she was persistent and courageous, going directly to the king to appeal for her land. The timing of her appeal was perfectly orchestrated by God. The king not only restored all that was hers, but also all the produce her land had yielded over the last seven years. This reminds us that our God isn't just interested in restoring what was lost but also about bringing new, abundant life in His kingdom, life to the fullest (Joel 2:24–27; John 10:10).

Q: In what situations is God calling you to trust Him for your future?

Q: How have you experienced restoration and new life from God?

2 Kings 8:7–15 [Read]

Talking Point 2: The Word of God reveals what is in the human heart.

Q: Why did the king of Aram inquire of Elisha? What does this tell us about him?

In this story, the focus shifts from Israel to Aram as Elisha travels to Damascus. Aram is also called Syria; it's north of Israel (N). The Arameans were the descendants of Shem, making them distant cousins of the Israelites. During this period of history, they were consistently attacking Israel. Just two chapters before, Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, had attacked Israel (N), but God had protected them through Elisha by striking the army with blindness. The king of Israel had wanted to kill their army, but Elisha told him to let them go (2 Kings 6:1–22). Sometime later, Aram had laid siege to Samaria and the king of Israel blamed Elisha for not destroying their army when they had the chance (2 Kings 6:24–33). The text doesn't say how long it had been since that siege, but these were still Israel's enemies; it is somewhat odd that Elisha would travel there. Yet this is consistent with the biblical theme throughout Scripture that Yahweh is concerned about all nations. He is sovereign over all the earth, not just one nation like other so-called "gods." He is a God who loves His enemies and desires that all humanity be saved, even those who seem to be against Him (Matthew 5:43–48; 1 Timothy 2:4).

It may seem strange that the king of Aram would inquire of a prophet of Israel about his illness, but it was relatively common for pagan nations to seek divine counsel wherever they could find it, essentially covering their bases by asking the gods of other nations as well as their own. This was strictly forbidden in God's law; Israel/Judah were to consult and worship Yahweh and only Yahweh. But other nations already had a pantheon of gods, so throwing in the advice of another nation's god wasn't a big deal.

Beyond that, it is possible that Ben-Hadad recognized that Israel's God had done a miracle at their camp when they heard the sounds of a great army. At the time, they certainly believed it was a human army of Egyptians or Hittites (7:6). But afterward, they would have surely heard the stories from Israel that it was a supernatural event, and he

would have heard reports that there was no great human army there. Even if he didn't fully believe it, the stories may have had him wondering if Israel's God might be more powerful than he realized. It's a running theme throughout the Old Testament that foreign kings sometimes acknowledge Yahweh's power without fully submitting to Him as Lord. The fact that Hazael brought such a huge gift, almost 10 tons of valuable goods of Damascus, and called himself "your son" would imply this wasn't a casual thing; he was showing Elisha great honor. Yet it was somewhat manipulative. He wasn't submitting to the Lord; he was trying to use Him.

It may also seem odd that Elisha would tell Hazael to seemingly lie to his master, Ben-Hadad. Elisha told Hazael to tell Ben-Hadad he would recover, yet he told Hazael that the Lord had shown him he would die. At first glance, this seems like Elisha was telling Hazael to lie, but it wasn't really a lie. Ben-Hadad didn't die of that illness, he would have recovered if not for Hazael's attack.³ Both were true at the same time – that he would recover *and* that he would surely die. In Scripture, prophets do not always deliver information in a straightforward, exhaustive way. Sometimes God's Word is given progressively, revealing a bit of truth at a time or in a way that reveals human motives. This isn't deception in a sinful sense but a controlled disclosure of information aligned with God's purposes. Elisha's telling Hazael this way gave Hazael an opportunity to decide what to do with this knowledge. What he did with the information revealed what was in his heart. He was a murderer.

God used shrewd tactics to handle those whose hearts were hardened. Ben-Hadad was not a humble seeker of truth. He was a pagan king who had done great violence against God's people; now seriously ill, he was offering extravagant gifts to Israel's prophet, grasping at anything he could, to try to get healing but not actually submitting to Yahweh as Lord. Hazael was not a neutral messenger; he was a man whose heart was already bent toward violence. Elisha's words didn't create the evil; they exposed it and allowed it to come to the surface. God's word is always true, but it doesn't always come in the way we expect. Sometimes it comforts; sometimes it confronts; sometimes it reveals what is in the human heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Q: Why is it important to consider *how* we say things, not just *what* we say? Give an example of the difference that can make, especially when speaking hard truths.

Q: How does the truth of God's Word reveal what is in our hearts?

Q: How does knowing God cares for our "enemies" change how we view difficult people?

2 Kings 8:11–13 and Luke 19:41–44 [Read]

Talking Point 3: God is deeply grieved by the sin of humanity.

Q: Why did Elisha weep when he looked at Hazael? What does this tell us about Elisha?

Q: Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem? What does this tell us about God (Luke 19:41-44)?

Elisha wept when he spoke about what Hazael would do to Israel as king of Aram. Hazael took the royal name Shalmanezar III and is called by that name in history books. He called himself a “dog” in this story, a term of self-deprecation, meaning he was no one important, had no value. An inscription found on a statue of him says, “son of nobody” reflecting a lowly, non-royal origin. Back in 1 Kings 19:15, after Elijah heard God in the whisper, the Lord told Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Aram, which would have been many years before this story. This is reminiscent of Samuel’s anointing of David as king long before he actually became king. But Hazael wasn’t a man after God’s own heart like David. He did horrible things to God’s people, which God used to execute the curses of the covenant. This shows us God is sovereign over all nations and kings and powers of this world; He raises them up and brings them down (Daniel 2:21). But just because He raises someone to power doesn’t mean He condones him. God uses wicked kings to accomplish His purposes.

In Scripture, weeping describes an audible and visible kind of crying that demonstrates deep lament. In the ancient Near East, funerals often included professional mourners who used outward forms of mourning – tearing garments, dust on the head, and prolonged wailing. In the Old Testament, the prophets were often found weeping over their messages of judgment. Isaiah wept bitterly over Judah’s impending fall (Isaiah 22:4). Jeremiah wept so much that many throughout Church history have called him “the weeping prophet” (Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17). Their tears foreshadowed the tears of Christ, who also wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). All these tears reflect the heart of God for His people.

Elisha wept because he saw what Hazael would do to God’s people, horrendous acts of violence. He knew these things were consequences of their breaking the covenant, yet he was still grieved by them. He didn’t wag his finger at Israel and say, “You deserve whatever you get for disobeying God.” He didn’t rejoice at their suffering. He wept over what would happen to them. Elisha wasn’t just announcing their judgment, he was feeling the weight of it deeply. This tells us something crucial about him. He not only carried God’s Word, but he also shared God’s heart for His people. God does not delight in judgment (Ezekiel 33:11). God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked; He is pleased when they turn from their wicked ways and find life in following Him (Ezekiel 18:23).

This is the heart of a true pastor, a shepherd of his people – someone who loves them deeply and is deeply grieved at their pain. Paul talked about the great sorrow and unceasing anguish he had in his heart for those who don’t know Jesus (Romans 9:1–3). He told the Philippians about those who live as enemies of the cross “with tears” (Philippians 3:18). He was not a distant observer or a condemning judge of the people; he was personally engaged, like a spiritual father who cares deeply for his children, a

loving shepherd who cares deeply for his sheep. This shows us how God's true prophets and pastors share His heart for His people.

When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, He used language very similar to Elisha's, prophesying the siege and destruction of Jerusalem that would happen by Rome in AD 70. Jerusalem would endure suffering because they did not receive Jesus when he came (Luke 19:41-44). Jesus wasn't just a prophet; He was God Himself made flesh. Seeing His mournful reaction to the looming destruction of Jerusalem is seeing directly into the heart of God.

Judgment is not something God delights in, but it is the necessary response of His holy justice when people persist in rejecting His grace and rebelling against Him. We see God's sorrow over human wickedness as far back as the flood, when Scripture says He was grieved by mankind's sin. Throughout Scripture, God's judgment is never portrayed as cold or detached. Though His holiness and justice require judgment, He takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked and repeatedly calls people to repentance (Ezekiel 18:23).

Q: How have you been grieved by the wickedness you have seen in the world around you?

Q: How can this grief inspire you to respond? How can you help the world around you?

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Took

Main Point: The Lord orchestrates all things to work together for His plan and purposes.

The Gospel challenges us not just to believe the truth, but to be burdened by it – to care enough about people's souls that it moves us to pray and act. As you begin this week, commit to two things: pray daily for the salvation of one specific person in your life who doesn't know Jesus, and look for an opportunity to have a Gospel conversation with him or her. Let that person's name become part of your prayers this week.

As you do, consider using the North American Mission Board's "Who's Your One" prayer guide to help you pray intentionally and faithfully:

<https://www.whosyourone.com/resource/prayer-guide/>

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on the ways you have seen God work in your life over the long term. How has He orchestrated things over long periods of time for your good in the end? What things in your life have seemed negative at first, but God used it for good? How have you experienced His compassionate care for you throughout your life? How have you seen Him work in small ways over the course of your life? How can you trust He is in control and working things out for your good?

PRAY: Pray for God to grow your trust. Ask for the wisdom and courage to trust His plan for your life, even when things don't seem as if they are going the way you want. Pray for the wisdom to know how to follow Him and the courage to do it.

ACT: Help the world. Reflect on something that deeply grieves you, such as world hunger, cancer, homelessness, etc. Research an organization that is helping to solve that problem and either donate your time or money to that organization this week.

¹ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/is-crying-good-for-you-2021030122020>

² The Israelites were supposed to let the land rest every seven years as a Sabbath for the land, but in all their time in the land, they never did it. This is why Jeremiah prophesied that they would be in exile in Babylon for seventy years. That's how many times they had skipped the Sabbath rest, so God would give the land its rest (2 Chronicles 36:21; Jeremiah 25:11–12).

³ Thomas L. Constable, [“2 Kings,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 553.