

Horrible Conditions in Samaria during the Syrian Siege

2 Kings 6:24-33

2 Kings 6:24-33 – *“And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey’s head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove droppings for five shekels of silver.*

Then, as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, “Help, my lord, O king!” And he said, “If the LORD does not help you, where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?” Then the king said to her, “What is troubling you?” And she answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.’ So we boiled my son, and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him’; but she has hidden her son.”

Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes; and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked, and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body. Then he said, “God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today!” But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him.

And the king sent a man ahead of him, but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, “Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door. Is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?” And while he was still talking with them, there was the messenger, coming down to him. And then the king said, “Surely this calamity is from the LORD; why should I wait for the LORD any longer?”

Background Notes

Verse 24: *“And it happened after this...”* The events of 2 Kings 6:24-33 happened after the Syrians had stopped sending raiding parties into the land of Israel (v23). However, at some later date, King Ben-Hadad II of Syria decided to come down from the north with his entire army. This time he besieged Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. That’s where King Jehoram’s palace was located, and that’s where Elisha lived.

In those days a siege would go on for months, sometimes more than a year. In a siege, the invading army would surround the walled city and close it off. No one could get out, no one could escape, and supplies could not get in. As a result, there would be great famine in the city. The people would literally be starved into surrender.

2 Kings 6 says the conditions in Samaria got so bad that a donkey’s head sold for eighty shekels of silver - about two pounds of silver! In the Jewish law a donkey was an unclean animal, so the conditions had to be very severe for any part of a donkey to be used for food! And a pint of dove’s dung, probably used for fuel, would be sold for five shekels of silver.

But that's not the worst of it. Verses 28-29 reveal that some desperate people had actually stooped to the sin of cannibalism, even eating their own children!

When King Jehoram learned that the horrible atrocity of cannibalism was taking place in his city, he decided that he wasn't going to wait any longer. He decided to kill Elisha and surrender to the Syrians. So he sent a messenger out to kill Elisha, and he followed him. The king arrived right behind the messenger (v33), and the king said, "*Surely this calamity is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?*" In other words, "I'm going to go ahead and surrender the city." At that point Elisha told the king the good news that the siege would be over very shortly, as we'll see in chapter 7.

Doctrinal Points

1. "Man's cruelty to man" is not God's fault.

Verses 28-29 demonstrate man's cruelty to man for sure - two women making a covenant to systematically kill their children and eat them. How could God allow this to happen?

This evil atrocity was not God's fault. In fact, God had predicted that this would take place as a consequence of departing from Him. Deuteronomy 28:52-57: "*They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you. You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you. The sensitive and very refined man among you will be hostile toward his brother, toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind, so that he will not give any of them the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he has nothing left in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her daughter, her placenta which comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of everything in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates.*"

Man's cruelty to man is not God's fault. God had predicted if His people would turn way from Him, turn away from the moral values and standards of His word, all kinds of evil practices would happen. Man's cruelty to man, then and today, is the result of mankind departing from God and from God's standards.

The tribal warfare and genocide that is currently going on in Rwanda today, is not God's fault. If mankind would turn to God and to His standards, man's cruelty to man would taper off. In fact, it's the only way it will stop. The cruelty being practiced in this country today, abortion - the killing of the unborn - is only the tip of the iceberg. The cruelty in this country will continue to get worse if our nation does not turn back to God and to Biblical standards. Man's cruelty to man is not God's fault.

2. Man shifts the blame when things go wrong.

People almost always try to shift the blame when things go wrong. We certainly can see that here. King Jehoram blamed everything and everybody but himself for the problems in his kingdom.

In verse 31 he blamed Elisha. He thought if he beheaded Elisha, things would get better! In verse 27, he blamed God. He said to the woman, *“If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you?”* In other words, “It’s not my fault.” Do you see him directing the blame toward God there? And in verse 33, he said, *“Surely this calamity is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?”* What he should have said is, “I recognize this calamity is from the Lord because of our sin. I will repent.” But no, he shifted the blame to God.

That’s exactly what Adam did, after he and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. What did Adam say when God confronted him in the Garden? In Genesis 3:11-12 God said, *“Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you not eat?”* And Adam replied, *“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate.”* Adam shifted the blame from himself to God, who had given Eve to him!

The point is that people always try to shift the blame when things go wrong. When was the last time you heard a government official in our country say, “It’s my fault.” Has that ever happened? Man always shifts the blame.

Christians shift the blame as well. Our problems are never our fault, are they? We were the “unfortunate victim of circumstances.” Or, “It’s because I wasn’t born with more brains, or more talent.” Or, “I didn’t have the right connections.” There are cases where our problems may not be our fault, but let’s face it. We always try to shift the blame.

We even blame God for the circumstances of our birth! Any time we say things like things are going wrong because we weren’t born with better brains, or more talent, or better looks, or more connections - we’re actually blaming God! We may not be as bad as Jehoram was, but we’re still guilty of the same sin of blaming God. People shift the blame when things go wrong.

Practical Applications

1. Listen to God, so He doesn’t have to shout!

God was certainly shouting in this event in 2 Kings 6. None of this had to happen. God had said that if His people would follow Him, He’d bless them and their land. But He had warned that if they did not follow, they would be judged. If the people had obeyed God, this disaster would not have happened. The people didn’t listen when God quietly warned them, so now God had to shout. But the nation still wasn’t listening.

How about us? Are we listening? C.S. Lewis said something like this: ‘God whispers in our pleasures but shouts in our pain.’ Is God whispering - or shouting - to you right now?

1 Corinthians 11:31 says this, *“If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.”* Let me paraphrase that verse: “Let’s listen, so God doesn’t have to shout.” That’s exactly what that verse is saying. Many Christians have to learn the hard way. Let’s listen so that God doesn’t have to shout.

2. Expect to suffer at times for sins that are not your own.

Expect to suffer at times for sins that are not your own. I think we can see that lesson in this passage. The famine in Samaria was not Elisha’s fault, but Elisha was trapped in the besieged city like everyone else. He suffered along with the rest of the people. Food was scarce for everyone, and Elisha had a hard time getting food. Prices were high, and Elisha had to pay those prices. We don’t read of God miraculously providing food or money for Elisha. He could have, but apparently He didn’t.

So Elisha suffered along with the rest of the people. And we can expect to suffer, at times, for sins that are not our own.

If God were to choose to judge our nation - to bring it to its knees - perhaps through an economic crisis like we’ve never known before, we would all suffer. Christians would suffer, too. People would be out of work, and wouldn’t be able to find a job. People wouldn’t be able to afford a car or gas. Food shortages might appear. Christians and their families would suffer, just like everyone else, even though we may not have been involved in the gross sins of our nation.

God may have to allow this to happen, to turn our nation around. And we can expect to suffer at times for sins that are not our own.