

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 4A**

**THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS**

**CHAPTER 6**

**INTRODUCTION**

Elisha continued performing miracles that only God could do. Chapter 6 gives no less than four accounts of miracles. Through these miracles, God reveals that He is the Supreme Being in all the earth. There is no one who can rival Him. Although He is transcendent above all, yet He reveals that He is also immanent in His creation. He is high above all things in heaven and on earth, yet He is near to everyone and in everything. The miracle of the floating axe-head shows He cares for His own. The King of Syria can secretly plan all his military strategies against Israel but he cannot keep them a secret before God. God protects His own. God, who sees everything, knows even the intents and secrets of the mind and heart of man. God also proves that His word and promises are true.

**OUTLINE**

1. The retrieving of the lost axe-head for a prophet (vv.1-7);

- 2 Frustration of marauding Syrians in clashes against Israel (vv.8-23);
3. The famine in the city of Samaria (vv.24-30).

**COMMENTARY**

**Retrieving of the Axe-Head– 6:1-7**

The young prophets told Elisha that they needed to have a larger place to accommodate them. The school of prophets that was probably the one in Jericho had become too small. The number of students had grown. God had blessed the school and the facilities needed to be enlarged. The work had to be done by the students themselves. It was a co-operative effort; every student would chip in. Elisha approved of the project. And one of the students urged Elisha to join them (6:3). Why did the Holy Spirit include this “little” incident in the life and ministry of Elisha? The incident seemed so insignificant! Perhaps, it was to show that the servants of God have simple basic needs like everyone else and that God is the One who will provide them with all they need. Elisha’s affirmative response shows that he was a caring and concerned leader. So he went down with them. The students cut down the trees and made beams for the construction of the cabins.

In the process of chopping the trees, a student’s axe-head came off and it dropped into the river Jordan. He cried in distress for it was a “borrowed” one. According to the Hebrew text, he actually “begged” for

the use of the axe. In those days, not every student had an axe for it was expensive. Now he had to replace this axe and obviously he could not afford to do so. The school would be under a great financial burden if it were to replace the axe-head for him. The student was honest to admit its loss quickly. Elisha heard his cry of distress and asked him where the iron fell. He showed the place. Elisha threw a stick in the vicinity where the iron fell. The axe-head “did swim” and the student-prophet could retrieve it. This was not a magic trick. Elisha’s throwing of the stick that floated on the water was to indicate that the axe-head would float so that it would be like that piece of wood that floated. Elisha did tell the student to retrieve the axe-head when it floated.

This is a miracle that was performed by God through Elisha who had no such power of his own. With God, nothing is impossible. For man, it is a miracle but for God, it is “ordinary”. The student-prophet learned the precious lesson that it was God who would build their homes and provide for their every need. They might have borrowed the axe and did the hard work but God is the One who provides! The incident also indicates that God cares for those who belong to Him, even in commonplace matters. This lesson of God’s provision is often forgotten by God’s children today. Self interest and self glory seem to dominate and win the day every day! As God’s children, we should realise that while we may be the ones working, it is God that is the one who gives the increase and He is the

builder of our lives and homes. We must remember **Deuteronomy 8:17-18** which says, “*And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.*”

### **Syrian Raids Frustrated – 6:8-12**

The Syrian “warred” against Israel. This was not an official declaration of war against an enemy country. There was relative peace between Syria and Israel. But the King of Syria approved of raids against Israel at the border between the two countries.<sup>1</sup> The interesting part in these border skirmishes is that Elisha knew the secret military moves by the Syrians even before they exercised them. Elisha then warned the King of Israel of the Syrian plans (6:9). Elisha was supernaturally endowed with the ability to know even the secret thoughts of the King of Syria.

The King of Syria was frustrated. It was natural for him to suspect one of his trusted servants to be a traitor and informant. One of his servants assured him that none of them was a traitor. He told the king that it was the work of Elisha, the prophet in Israel and added that he knew even his inner secrets. The phrase used was “the prophet that *is* in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber (6:12).” This shows that

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<sup>1</sup> This is just like the border clashes between Pakistan and India today.

Elisha's reputation as a miracle worker was known even among the Syrian soldiers! On hearing this, the King of Syria ordered his servants to find out where Elisha was so that he might "fetch" (seize) him. The spies returned and reported that Elisha was in Dothan. Dothan was about 18 kilometres from the city of Samaria and 150 km (as the crow flies) from Damascus, the capital city of Syria. So the King of Syria sent a strong army on horses and chariots, probably his crack-commandoes, to capture Elisha.

The reaction of the king is expected and very common even in today's context. There was no fear of God in him. He cared only in the removal of the "stumbling block" that stood in his way to destroying Israel. If only he would take a step back and realise what was told to him about the power of God through Elisha! Nothing could be kept secret from Elisha! If he could believe what he heard, he would have realised that even his plan to "seize" Elisha was known to Elisha even before the soldiers were sent out? What a fool he was. So consumed was he by his own perverted agenda that he made one blunder after another, to his own peril and pain. Sinful men today are no different. The obsessions of wicked men have been the ruin of untold millions throughout the ages. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and not the kingdom of man even if that man is self! Seeking self will be our ruination.

### **Chariots of Fire – 6:13-17**

When Elisha's servant (might not be Gehazi) woke up early in the morning, he saw the Syrian soldiers on their horses and chariots surrounding the city. Frantic and frightened, he cried out in despair to Elisha (6:15b): "Alas, my master! How shall we do?" Elisha calmed his fears and assured him "they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (6:16). Elisha prayed to the LORD "to open his eyes that he may see."

And the LORD opened his eyes. He saw full on the mountains that surround Dothan were "horses and chariots of fire". Elisha could see the chariots of fire whereas his servant could not. This is one of the most remembered portions of Holy Scriptures. It teaches that God was able to protect His servant from bodily harm if He chose to. In this case, He protected Elisha and his servant from being captured by the Syrians. These chariots of horses descended from the mountains and moved towards Elisha.

Spiritual eyesight is from God. It was given to Elisha but not to his servant until Elisha prayed and the LORD opened his eyes. Elisha who saw was not in the slightest perturbed by the armies of Syria. He had peace because he saw with his spiritual eyes the LORD's protection. No matter how "powerful" the enemies might appear to be, they are nothing in the sight of God.

### **The Syrians Blinded – 6:18-23**

Elisha prayed again. This time he called upon the LORD to smite the Syrian soldiers with blindness. One of the purposes of this miracle was to show the Syrians that they were powerless when they came into conflict with a prophet of the true God. The text suggests that their blindness was complete. They could not see at all. Elisha “lied” to them to lead them to Samaria, the capital city of Israel. These soldiers of Syria were captured without a fight when they were brought as blind men by the same man they came to capture!

They could not recognise Elisha who led them to Samaria because of their blindness. This was another miracle done by the LORD through Elisha’s prayer. Elisha was not lying when he told the soldiers that he would lead them to the city of Samaria to get the man whom they were seeking. He was on his way to the city. His intention was actually to save the lives of the soldiers. When they arrived in the city of Samaria, Elisha again prayed asking the LORD to open the soldiers’ eyes. The LORD opened their eyes and the Syrians realised that they were in the centre of the city of Samaria. King Jehoram asked Elisha whether he should order that the Syrians be massacred. His repetition of “shall I smite them” reflects his strong desire to rid Israel of one of her closest enemies on her north! What an opportunity for the king of Israel to fulfil his desire! Can you blame him for wanting his enemies removed from the scene or at least receive their just

deserts? The carnal heart will shout a resounding yes!

Elisha forbade him to issue the order for it was unlawful to kill a prisoner of war. Instead Elisha told the king to feed them and return them to their king. Interestingly, King Jehoram obeyed Elisha and the Syrian soldiers were well fed and sent back to their country. Elisha’s purpose of being kind to the enemies, who sought to kill him, was to impress on them that the LORD (YAHWEH) was not only powerful but all-sufficient. If King Jehoram were to kill them, Elisha’s miracle would have been fruitless. Their release glorified the God of Israel and peace between the two countries was secured. As with all treaties made between sinful men, this peace was short lived!

### **Famine – 6:24-33**

Ben-Hadad, the King of Syria, laid a siege on the city of Samaria. The objective was to starve the city to death. Our present day terminology is called “economic sanction”! Surrender or starve. The bands of Syria ‘that came no more into the land of Israel’ (v.23) refer to only that particular “band” which were returned. Other bands did go into the land of Israel.

The siege by the Syrians effected a very severe famine in the city of Samaria. The details described were gruesome and showed how grave the situation inside Samaria became. An ass’ head was sold for 80 pieces of silver (about S\$300). The meat of a donkey was considered unclean for eating; let alone the donkey’s head. No Israelite would eat

the head of an ass! The starvation in Samaria was indeed dire!

The Samaritans were willing to eat “dove dung” which was sold for five pieces (about S\$20) of silver for a quarter of a “cab” (about a third of a litre). They were seriously desperate. The most repulsive incident was that of the woman who ate her dead son. The King of Israel admitted that he was helpless (6:27). When the king heard the woman’s story, he “rent his clothes” and wore sackcloth as he walked on the walls of the city. The people could see that he was grieving. The king burst out in anger against Elisha. He blamed Elisha probably because he did not pray to God to break the siege and save the people. He ordered the execution of Elisha.

Elisha foretold in the presence of some elders in his house that “this son of a murderer” (referring to King Jehoram, the son of Ahab, a murderer) had sent an executioner to behead him and that the king was right behind the executioner. He then told the elders to bar the executioner from entering the house until the king arrived. As soon as he finished speaking, both the executioner and the king arrived. The king cried out, “Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?” (v.33). The king blamed the LORD for the famine, but at the same time, expressed, “What should he wait for the LORD any longer?” This was a rhetorical question. No reply was expected. It was his lamentation: I waited for the LORD and what do I get? Famine and death inside Samaria!

## PRACTICAL VALUE

The incidence of the miracles recorded in this chapter leaves a great impression. The floating axe-head, Elisha’s supernatural ability to know the Syrians’ military moves, the blinding and restoring of the eyesight of the Syrian soldiers, and the incredible way in which the Syrians abandoned their camp. These phenomena may seem strange and impossible because they are not within the power of men to make these things happen. But they are not impossible with *God*. God created the whole universe and the earth and all that are therein by His word!<sup>2</sup> We must remember that what is impossible with men is commonplace to God. So the miracles and the events did happen as written. If these things were not true, they would have no value at all, and would serve no purpose. But they are true. We can learn many precious and valuable lessons that would help us to understand God and man, and to lead a meaningful and purposeful life.

We learn that God the Creator of mankind cares for His people. He cares about even the smallest details in their life. Sometimes, He would employ supernatural means to help His people. Sometimes, He uses the castaways of society to achieve his purpose as illustrated by the four lepers. God is always merciful. He revealed through Elisha how he was

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 33:6 **By** the **word** of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them **by** the breath of **his** mouth.

merciful to the Syrian soldiers who wanted to kill him. But Elisha saved their lives and treated them with kindness. God also shows that He will not tolerate those who are unbelieving. Those people would face His wrath and judgement. Above all, God reveals that He is both merciful and holy.

Whenever we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, we should not panic like Elisha’s servant. Elisha teaches us to look at our adverse circumstances from God’s perspective. If we have maintained a vital relationship with God, like Elisha had, we need not fear. As Paul learned too that “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). As some God-fearing men have observed, there are always two parts to reality – the part we can see and the part that is hidden from us. Sometimes, we should not pray, “Lord, please save me”; but “Lord, please open my eyes that I may see Your providential presence”. Indeed, if we use our eyes of faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ, our Christian life is beautiful, meaningful, powerful, and full of joy

One more fact that we learn is that Elisha always prayed. He was like his master, Elijah. In his dealing with the Syrian army, he prayed at each move he took. Prayer is the Christians’ most powerful weapon.  
AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** 2 Kings 6:1-7; Philipians 4:6; Matthew 6:30-34

**TUESDAY:** 2 Kings 6:8-23; Isaiah 12:2; Romans 12:19-21.

**WEDNESDAY:** 2 Kings 6:24-33; Isaiah 40:31; Psalm 123:1-4.

**THURSDAY:** 2 Kings 6:1-33.

**FRIDAY:** 2 Kings 6:1-33.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Concerning the miracle of the floating axe-head, what is revealed about God’s attributes and what do you think is the purpose behind the miracle?

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2. In 2 Kings 6:13-17, why was the servant of Elisha not able to see whereas Elisha was able to see into the spiritual realm? What spiritual principle can we learn that will comfort and encourage us when the things in our daily life seem overpowering?

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3. What do you think of Elisha's kind treatment of the Syrian soldiers? Should Christians do likewise to their enemies? How to you reconcile this with Psalm 139:19-24?

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4. How serious was the famine in the city of Samaria? What must we do if we are in a similar situation?

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5. Elisha saw before his servant could see. The bands of Syrians that came with evil intent were made blind. But they saw again! What lessons could we learn from this incident concerning spiritual sight?

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6. What is revealed about God's personality and character in this chapter? In what way has this revelation helped you in your life?

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