

# CHAPTER 6

In this chapter we have,

- I.** A further account of the wondrous works of Elisha.
  - 1.** His making iron to swim (v. 1-7).
  - 2.** His disclosing to the king of Israel the secret counsels of the king of Syria (v. 8-12).
  - 3.** His saving himself out of the hands of those who were sent to apprehend him (v. 13-23).
- II.** The besieging of Samaria by the Syrians and the great distress the city was reduced to (v. 24-33). The relief of it is another of the wonders wrought by Elisha's word, which we shall have the story of in the next chapter. Elisha is still a great blessing both to church and state, both to the sons of the prophets and to his prince.

## ~~2~~ 2 KINGS 6:1-7

### IRON MADE TO SWIM

Several things may be observed here,

**I.** Concerning the sons of the prophets, and their condition and character. The college here spoken of seems to be that at Gilgal, for there Elisha was (~~2~~ 2 Kings 4:38), and it was near Jordan; and, probably, wherever Elisha resided as many as could of the sons of the prophets flocked to him for the advantage of his instructions, counsels, and prayers. Every one would covet to dwell with him and be near him. Those that would be teachers should lay out themselves to get the best advantages for learning. Now observe,

**1.** Their number increased so that they wanted room: *The place is too strait for us* (v. 1) — a good hearing, for it is a sign many are added to them. Elisha's miracles doubtless drew in many. Perhaps they increased the more now that Gehazi was cashiered, and, it is likely, an honest man put in his room, to take care of their provisions; for it should seem (by that

instance, <sup><12148></sup>2 Kings 4:43) that Naaman's case was not the only one in which he grudged his master's generosity.

**2.** They were humble men and did not affect that which was gay or great. When they wanted room they did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble stones, and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up a plain hut or cottage with. It becomes the sons of the prophets, who profess to look for great things in the other world, to be content with mean things in this.

**3.** They were poor men, and men that had no interest in great ones. It was a sign that Joram was king, and Jezebel ruled too, or the sons of the prophets, when they wanted room, would have needed only to apply to the government, not to consult among themselves about the enlargement of their buildings. God's prophets have seldom been the world's favourites. Nay, so poor were they that they had not wherewithal to hire workmen (but must leave their studies, and work for themselves), no, nor to buy tools, but must borrow of their neighbours. Poverty then is no bar to prophecy.

**4.** They were industrious men, and willing to take pains. They desired not to live, like idle drones (idle *monks*, I might have said), upon the labours of others, but only desired leave of their president to work for themselves. As the sons of the prophets must not be so taken up with contemplation as to render themselves unfit for action, so much less must they so indulge themselves in their ease as to be averse to labour. He that must eat or die must work or starve, <sup><3118></sup>2 Thessalonians 3:8, 10. Let no man think an honest employment either a burden or disparagement.

**5.** They were men that had a great value and veneration for Elisha; though they were themselves prophets, they paid much deference to him.

**(1.)** They would not go about to build at all without his leave, v. 2. It is good for us all to be suspicious of our own judgment, even when we think we have most reason for it, and to be desirous of the advice of those who are wiser and more experienced; and it is especially commendable in the sons of the prophets to take their fathers along with them, and to act in all things of moment under their direction, *permissu superiorum* — *by permission of their superiors*.

(2.) They would not willingly go to fell timber without his company: “*Go with thy servants* (v. 3), not only to advise us in any exigence, but to keep good order among us, that, being under they eye, we may behave as becomes us.” Good disciples desire to be always under good discipline.

6. They were honest men, and men that were in care to give all men their own. When one of them, accidentally fetching too fierce a stroke (as those that work seldom are apt to be violent), threw off his axe-head into the water, he did not say, “It was a mischance, and who can help it? It was the fault of the helve, and the owner deserved to stand to the loss.” No, he cries out with deep concern, *Alas, master! For it was borrowed*, v. 5. Had the axe been his own, it would only have troubled him that he could not be further serviceable to his brethren; but now, besides that, it troubles him that he cannot be just to the owner, to whom he ought to be not only just but grateful. Note, We ought to be as careful of that which is borrowed as of that which is our own, that it receives no damage, because we must love our neighbour as ourselves and do as we would be done by. It is likely this prophet was poor, and had not wherewithal to pay for the axe, which made the loss of it so much the greater trouble. To those that have an honest mind the sorest grievance of poverty is not so much their own want or disgrace as their being by it rendered unable to pay their just debts.

## II. Concerning the father of the prophets, Elisha.

1. That he was a man of great condescension and compassion; he went with the sons of the prophets to the woods, when they desired his company, v. 3. Let no man, especially no minister, think himself too great to stoop to do good, but be tender to all.

2. That he was a man of great power; he could make iron to swim, contrary to its nature (v. 6), for the God of nature is not tied up to its laws. He did not throw the helve after the hatchet, but cut down a new stick, and cast it into the river. We need not double the miracle by supposing that the stick sunk to fetch up the iron, it was enough that it was a signal of the divine summons to the iron to rise. God's grace can thus raise the stony iron heart which has sunk into the mud of this world, and raise up affections naturally earthly, to things above.

## THE SYRIANS ENSNARED

Here we have Elisha, with his spirit of prophecy, serving the king, as before helping the sons of the prophets; for that, as other gifts, is given to every man to profit withal; and, whatever abilities any man has of doing good, he is by them made a debtor both to the wise and unwise. Observe here,

**I.** How the king of Israel was informed by Elisha of all the designs and motions of his enemy, the king of Syria, more effectually than he could have been by the most vigilant and faithful spies. If the king of Syria, in a secret council of war, determined in which place to make an inroad upon the coasts of Israel, where he thought it would be the greatest surprise and they would be least able to make resistance, before his forces could receive his orders the king of Israel had notice of them from Elisha, and so had opportunity of preventing the mischief; and many a time, v. 8-10. See here,

**1.** That the enemies of God's Israel are politic in their devices, and restless in their attempts, against him. *They shall not know, nor see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them,* <14041> Nehemiah 4:11.

**2.** All those devices are known to God, even those that are deepest laid. He knows not only what men do, but what they design, and has many ways of countermining them.

**3.** It is a great advantage to us to be warned of our danger, that we may stand upon our guard against it. The work of God's prophets is to give us warning; if, being warned, we do not save ourselves, it is our own fault, and our blood will be upon our own head. The king of Israel would regard the warnings Elisha gave him of his danger by the Syrians, but not the warnings he gave him of his danger by his sins. Such warnings are little heeded by the most; they will save themselves from death, but not from hell.

**II.** How the king of Syria resented this. He suspected treachery among his senators, and that his counsels were betrayed, v. 11. But one of his servants, that had heard, by Naaman and others, of Elisha's wondrous works, concludes it must needs be he that gave this intelligence to the king

of Israel, v. 12. What could not he discover who could tell Gehazi his thoughts? Here a confession of the boundless knowledge, as before of the boundless power, of Israel's God, is extorted from Syrians. Nothing done, said, thought, by any person, in any place, at any time, is out of the reach of God's cognizance.

## ~~118~~ 2 KINGS 6:13-23

### THE SYRIANS INFORMED

Here is,

**I.** The great force which the king of Syria sent to seize Elisha. He found out where he was, at Dothan (v. 13), which was not far from Samaria; thither he sent a great host, who were to come upon him by night, and to bring him dead or alive, v. 14. Perhaps he had heard that when only one captain and his fifty men were sent to take Elijah they were baffled in the attempt, and therefore he sent an *army* against Elisha, as if the fire from heaven that consumed fifty men could not as easily consume 50,000. Naaman could tell him that Elisha dwelt not in any strong-hold, nor was attended with any guards, nor had any such great interest in the people that he needed to fear a tumult among them; what occasion then was there for this great force? But thus he hoped to make sure of him, especially coming upon him by surprise. Foolish man! Did he believe that Elisha had informed the king of Israel of his secret counsels or not? If not, what quarrel had he with him? If he did, could he be so weak as to imagine that Elisha would not discover the designs laid against himself, and that, having interest enough in heaven to discover them, he would not have interest enough to defeat them? Those that fight against God, his people, and prophet, know not what they do.

**II.** The grievous fright which the prophet's servant was in, when he perceived the city surrounded by the Syrians, and the effectual course which the prophet took to pacify him and free him from his fears. It seems, Elisha accustomed his servant to rise early, that is the way to bring something to pass, and to do the work of a day in its day. Being up, we may suppose he heard the noise of soldiers, and thereupon looked out, and was aware of an army compassing the city (v. 15), with great assurance no

doubt of success, and that they should have this troublesome prophet in their hands presently. Now observe, 1. What a consternation he was in. He ran straight to Elisha, to bring him an account of it: “*Alas, master!*” (said he) “*what shall we do? We are undone, it is to no purpose to think either of fighting or flying, but we must unavoidably fall into their hands.*” Had he but studied David's Psalms, which were then extant, he might have learnt *not to be afraid of 10,000 of people* (<sup>418B</sup>Psalm 3:6), no, not of *a host encamped against him*, <sup>427B</sup>Psalm 27:3. Had he considered that he was embarked with his master, by whom God had done great things, and whom he would not now leave to *fall into the hands of the uncircumcised*, and who, having saved others, would no doubt save himself, he would not have been thus at a loss. If he had only said, *What shall I do?* it would have been like that of the disciples: *Lord, save us, we perish;* but he needed not to include his master as being in distress, nor to say, *What shall we do?* 2. How his master quieted him,

(1.) By word. What he said to him (v. 16) is spoken to all the faithful servants of God, when *without are fightings and within are fears*: “*Fear not with that fear which has torment and amazement, for those that are with us, to protect us, are more than those that are against us, to destroy us — angels unspeakably more numerous — God infinitely more powerful.*” When we are magnifying the causes of our fear we ought to possess ourselves with clear, and great, and high thoughts of God and the invisible world. *If God be for us, we know what follows*, <sup>451B</sup>Romans 8:31.

(2.) By vision, v. 17.

[1.] It seems Elisha was much concerned for the satisfaction of his servant. Good men desire, not only to be easy themselves, but to have those about them easy. Elisha had lately parted with his old man, and this, having newly come into his service, had not the advantage of experience; his master was therefore desirous to give him other convincing evidence of that omnipotence which employed him and was therefore employed for him. Note, Those whose faith is strong ought tenderly to consider and compassionate those who are weak and of a timorous spirit, and to do what they can to strengthen their hands.

[2.] He saw himself safe, and wished no more than that his servant might see what he saw, a guard of angels round about him; such as were his master's convoy to the gates of heaven were his protectors against the gates of hell — *chariots of fire, and horses of fire*. Fire is both dreadful

and devouring; that power which was engaged for Elisha's protection could both terrify and consume the assailants. As angels are God's messengers, so they are his soldiers, his hosts (<sup><03P></sup>Genesis 32:2), his legions, or regiments, (<sup><05B></sup>Matthew 26:53), for the good of his people.

[3.] For the satisfaction of his servant there needed no more than the opening of his eyes; *that* therefore he prayed for, and obtained for him: *Lord, open his eyes that he may see.* The eyes of his body were open, and with them he saw the danger. “Lord, open the eyes of his faith, that with them he may see the protection we are under.” Note, *First*, The greatest kindness we can do for those that are fearful and faint-hearted is to pray for them, and so to recommend them to the mighty grace of God. *Secondly*, The opening of our eyes will be the silencing of our fears. In the dark we are most apt to be frightened. The clearer sight we have of the sovereignty and power of heaven the less we shall fear the calamities of this earth.

**III.** The shameful defeat which Elisha gave to the host of Syrians who came to seize him. They thought to make a prey of him, but he made fools of them, perfectly played with them, so far was he from fearing them or any damage by them.

**1.** He prayed to God to smite them with blindness, and they were all struck blind immediately, not stone-blind, nor so as to be themselves aware that they were blind, for they could see the light, but their sight was so altered that they could not know the persons and places they were before acquainted with, v. 18. They were so confounded that those among them whom they depended upon for information did not know this place to be Dothan nor this person to be Elisha, but *groped at noon day as in the night* (<sup><290></sup>Isaiah 59:10; <sup><812></sup>Job 12:24, 25); their memory failed them, and their distinguishing faculty. See the power of God over the minds and understanding of men, both ways; he enlightened the eyes of Elisha's friend, and darkened the eyes of his foes, that they might see indeed, but not perceive, <sup><208></sup>Isaiah 6:9 *For this twofold judgment Christ came into this world, that those who see not might see, and that those who see might be made blind* (<sup><808></sup>John 9:39), a saviour of life to some, of death to others.

**2.** When they were thus bewildered and confounded he led them to Samaria (v. 19), promising that he would show them the man whom they sought, and he did so. He did not lie to them when he told them, *This is*

*not the way, nor is this the city* where Elisha is; for he had now come out of the city; and if they would see him, they must go to another city to which he would direct them. Those that fight against God and his prophets deceive themselves, and are justly given up to delusions.

**3.** When he had brought them to Samaria he prayed to God so to open their eyes and restore them their memories that they might see where they were (v. 20), *and behold*, to their great terror, *they were in the midst of Samaria*, where, it is probable, there was a standing force sufficient to cut them all off, or make them prisoners of war. Satan, the god of this world, blinds men's eyes, and so deludes them into their own ruin; but, when God enlightens their eyes, they then see themselves in the midst of their enemies, captives to Satan and in danger of hell, though before they thought their condition good. The enemies of God and his church, when they fancy themselves ready to triumph, will find themselves conquered and triumphed over.

**4.** When he had them at his mercy he made it appear that he was influenced by a divine goodness as well as a divine power.

**(1.)** He took care to protect them from the danger into which he had brought them, and was content to show them what he could have done; he needed not the sword of an angel to avenge his cause, the sword of the king of Israel is at his service if he please (v. 21): *My father* (so, respectfully does the king now speak to him, though, soon after, he swore his death), *shall I smite them?* And, again, as if he longed for the assault, *Shall I smite them?* Perhaps, he remembered how God was displeased at his father for *letting go out of his hands* those whom he had put it in his power to destroy, and he would not offend in like manner; yet such a reverence has he for the prophet that he will not strike a stroke without his commission. But the prophet would by no means suffer him to meddle with them; they were brought hither to be convinced and shamed, not to be killed, v. 22. Had they been *his* prisoners, taken captive by his sword and bow, when they asked quarter it would have been barbarous to deny, and, when he had given it to them, it would have been perfidious to do them any hurt, and against the laws of arms to kill men in cool blood. But they were not his prisoners; they were God's prisoners and the prophet's, and therefore he must do them no harm. Those that humble themselves under God's hand take the best course to secure themselves.

(2.) He took care to provide for them; he ordered the king to treat them handsomely and then dismiss them fairly, which he did, v. 23.

[1.] It was the king's praise that he was so obsequious to the prophet, contrary to his inclination, and, as it seemed, to his interest, <sup><0218></sup>1 Samuel 24:19. Nay, so willing was he to oblige Elisha that, whereas he was ordered openly to set *bread and water* before them (which are good fare for captives), he *prepared great provision* for them, for the credit of his court and country and of Elisha.

[2.] It was the prophet's praise that he was so generous to his enemies, who, though they came to take him, could not but go away admiring him, as both the mightiest and kindest man they ever met with. The great duty of loving enemies, and doing good to those that hate us, was both commanded in the Old Testament (<sup><0252></sup>Proverbs 25:21, 22, *If thy enemy hunger, feed him,* <sup><0234></sup>Exodus 23:4, 5) and practised, as here by Elisha. His predecessor had given a specimen of divine justice when he called for flames of fire on the heads of his persecutors to consume them, but he have a specimen of divine mercy in heaping coals of fire on the heads of his persecutors to melt them. Let not us then be *overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

**IV.** The good effect this had, for the present, upon the Syrians. They *came no more into the land of Israel* (v. 23), namely, upon this errand, to take Elisha; they saw it was to no purpose to attempt that, nor would any of their bands be persuaded to make an assault on so great and good a man. The most glorious victory over an enemy is to turn him into a friend.

## <sup><0182></sup>2 KINGS 6:24-33

### THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

This last paragraph of this chapter should, of right, have been the first of the next chapter, for it begins a new story, which is there continued and concluded. Here is,

**I.** The siege which the king of Syria laid to Samaria and the great distress which the city was reduced to thereby. The Syrians had soon forgotten the kindnesses they had lately received in Samaria, and very ungratefully, for

aught that appears without any provocation, sought the destruction of it, v. 24. There are base spirits that can never feel obliged. The country, we may suppose, was plundered and laid waste when this capital city was brought to the last extremity, v. 25. The dearth which had of late been in the land was probably the occasion of the emptiness of their stores, or the siege was so sudden that they had not time to lay in provisions; so that, while the sword devoured without, the famine within was more grievous (<sup><2749></sup>Lamentations 4:9): for, it should seem, the Syrians designed not to storm the city, but to starve it. So great was the scarcity that an ass's head, that has but little flesh on it and that unsavoury, unwholesome, and ceremonially unclean, was sold for five pounds, and a small quantity of fitches, or lentiles, or some such coarse corn, then called *dove's dung*, no more of it than the quantity of six eggs, for five pieces of silver, about twelve or fifteen shillings. Learn to value plenty, and to be thankful for it; see how contemptible money is, when, in time of famine, it is so freely parted with for anything that is eatable.

**II.** The sad complaint which a poor woman had to make to the king, in the extremity of the famine. He was *passing by upon the wall* to give orders for the mounting of the guard, the posting of the archers, the repair of the breaches, and the like, when a woman of the city cried to him, *Help, my lord, O king!* v. 26. Whither should the subject, in distress, go for help but to the prince, who is, by office, the protector of right and the avenger of wrong? He returns but a melancholy answer (v. 27): *If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I?* Some think it was a *quarrelling* word, and the language of his fretfulness: "Why dost thou expect anything from me, when God himself deals thus hardly with us?" Because he could not help her as he would, out of the floor or the wine-press, he would not help her at all. We must take heed of being made cross by afflictive providences. It rather seems to be a *quieting* word: "Let us be content, and make the best of our affliction, looking up to God, for, till he help us, I cannot help thee." 1. He laments the emptiness of the floor and the wine-press. These were not as they had been; even the king's failed. We read (v. 23) of great provisions which he had a command, sufficient for the entertainment of an army, yet now he has not wherewithal to relieve one poor woman. Scarcity sometimes follows upon great plenty; we cannot be sure that *to-morrow shall be as this day*, <sup><2812></sup>Isaiah 56:12; <sup><1816></sup>Psalms 30:6.

**2.** He acknowledges himself thereby disabled to help, unless God would help them. Note, Creatures are helpless things without God, for every

creature is that, all that, and only that, which he makes it to be. However, though he cannot help her, he is willing to hear her (v. 28): “*What ails thee? Is there anything singular in thy case, or dost thou fare worse than thy neighbours?*” Truly yes; she and one of her neighbours had made a barbarous agreement, that, all provisions failing, they should boil and eat her son first and then her neighbour's; hers was eaten (who can think of it without horror?) and now her neighbour hid hers, v. 28, 29. See an instance of the dominion which the flesh has got above the spirit, when the most natural affections of the mind may be thus overpowered by the natural appetites of the body. See the word of God fulfilled; among the threatenings of God's judgments upon Israel for their sins this was one (~~DESS~~ Deuteronomy 28:53-57), that they should eat the flesh of their own children, which one would think incredible, yet it came to pass.

**III.** The king's indignation against Elisha upon this occasion. He lamented the calamity, *rent his clothes, and had sackcloth upon his flesh* (v. 30), as one heartily concerned for the misery of his people, and that it was not in his power to help them; but he did not lament his own iniquity, nor the iniquity of his people, which was the procuring cause of the calamity; he was not sensible that his *ways and his doings had procured this to himself; this is his wickedness, for it is bitter. The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.* Instead of vowing to pull down the calves at Dan and Beth-el, or letting the law have its course against the prophets of Baal and of the groves, he swears *the death of Elisha*, v. 31. Why, what is the matter? What had Elisha done? his head is the most innocent and valuable in all Israel, and yet that must be devoted, and made an anathema. Thus in the days of the persecuting emperors, when the empire groaned under any extraordinary calamity, the fault was laid on the Christians, and they were doomed to destruction. *Christianos ad leones* — *Away with the Christians to the lions.* Perhaps Jehoram was in this heat against Elisha because he had foretold this judgment, or had persuaded him to hold out, and not surrender, or rather because he did not, by his prayers, raise the siege, and relieve the city, which he though he could do but would not; whereas till they repented and reformed, and were ready for deliverance, they had no reason to expect that the prophet should pray for it.

**IV.** The foresight Elisha had of the king's design against him, v. 32. He sat in his house well composed, and the elders with him, well employed no

doubt, while the king was like a wild bull in a net, or like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; he told the elders there was an officer coming from the king to cut off his head, and bade them stop him at the door, and not let him in, for the king his master was just following him, to revoke the order, as we may suppose. The same spirit of prophecy that enabled Elisha to tell him what was done at a distance authorized him to call the king *the son of a murderer*, which, unless we could produce such an extraordinary commission, it is not for us to initiate; far be it from us to despise dominion and to speak evil of dignities. He appealed to the elders whether he had deserved so ill at the king's hands: "See whether in this he be not the son of a murderer?" For *what evil had Elisha done? He had not desired the woeful day,* <sup><2476></sup>Jeremiah 17:16.

**V.** The king's passionate speech, when he came to prevent the execution of his edict for the beheading of Elisha. He seems to have been in a struggle between his convictions and his corruptions, knew not what to say, but, seeing things brought to the last extremity, he even abandoned himself to despair (v. 33): *This evil is of the Lord*. Therein his notions were right and well applied; it is a general truth that all penal evil is of the Lord, as the first cause, and sovereign judge (<sup><3016></sup>Amos 3:6), and this we ought to apply to particular cases: if all evil, then this evil, whatever it is we are now groaning under, whoever are the instruments, God is the principal agent of it. But his inference from this truth was foolish and wicked: *What should I wait for the Lord any longer?* When Eli, and David, and Job, said, *It is of the Lord*, they grew patient upon it, but this bad man grew outrageous upon it: "I will neither fear worse nor expect better, for worse cannot come and better never will come: we are all undone, and there is no remedy." It is an unreasonable thing to be weary of waiting for God, for he is a God of judgment, and blessed are all those that wait for him.