



# *God Provides*

God can be trusted to provide for our needs.

## **2 KINGS 7:1-15**

People are drawn to stories of unlikely heroes: the least known player on the team scoring the winning run, a child saving her family from a fire, and the smallest rescuer being able to reach a trapped person. In 2 Kings 7, we find four men who were the unlikeliest of heroes. They were shunned, yet God chose them to deliver the news of His provision.

**Why do we like to hear stories about heroes most would have considered to be the least likely to deliver?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **2 KINGS 6:1–10:36** (2 CHRON. 21:1–22:9)

First Kings opens with the death of Israel's King David. During his reign, the Israelites used weapons made of iron. This had not been the case with David's predecessor, King Saul. In fact, during Saul's reign, iron was rare in Israel. When the Israelites battled the Philistines at Geba, only Saul and his son Jonathan had iron weapons because the Philistines controlled iron metallurgy during this time. (See 1 Sam. 13:19-20.) As Israel increased in wealth and strength during David's reign, resources increased and improved, including the nation's weapons and military equipment. In the battles recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, iron weaponry dominated. Defensive weapons included shields, helmets, and armor. Offensive weapons included swords, daggers, spears, darts, and axes. Javelins, slings with sling stones, and bows and arrows were common for long-range engagement. Where geography allowed, armies used horses and chariots.

An especially effective military tactic was to besiege a walled or fortified city. An opposing army would surround the city and cut off its food and water supplies (2 Kings 6:24-29). Starvation was inevitable. Further complicating matters, survivors had to bury the dead within the city walls, which contaminated the water supply. Disease would escalate as conditions worsened. Inhabitants had two options, either surrender or die.

In this week's Bible passage, the Arameans had besieged Israel's capital city of Samaria. Conditions were dire. Food supplies were gone, famine had set in, and people were starving. Some people in Samaria had resorted to cannibalism (6:28-29). Others were paying exorbitant prices for food that was ritually unclean and impure. Israel's king, likely Jehoram, blamed Elisha for Samaria's dire situation and threatened to kill him (6:31-32).

**Read 2 Kings 7:1-15. What evidence do you see that God is able to bring hope out of what seems to be a hopeless situation?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## DOUBTS (2 KINGS 7:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> Elisha replied, “Hear the word of the LORD! This is what the LORD says: ‘About this time tomorrow at Samaria’s gate, six quarts of fine flour will sell for a half ounce of silver and twelve quarts of barley will sell for a half ounce of silver.’” <sup>2</sup> Then the captain, the king’s right-hand man, responded to the man of God, “Look, even if the LORD were to make windows in heaven, could this really happen?” Elisha announced, “You will in fact see it with your own eyes, but you won’t eat any of it.”

### VERSES 1-2

Hearing the king’s threats, Elisha replied by saying, *Hear the word of the LORD!* He spoke a message of hope, promising that *tomorrow . . . six quarts of fine flour or twelve quarts of barley would sell for a half ounce of silver* at the city gate. To put that in perspective, at the time Elisha spoke these words, the people of Samaria were exchanging thirty-four ounces of silver for a donkey’s head and two ounces of silver for a cup of dove’s dung—both of which they were eating (6:25). Given the current state of hunger and starvation in Samaria, Elisha’s words sounded absurd. He was declaring that the famine would be over.

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible atlas and Bible dictionary to locate and learn about places mentioned in Scripture.*

Locate the city of Samaria in a Bible atlas. Notice the terrain around the city—a large plain surrounds it, with a rim of mountains in the distance. What role did the geography play in the king’s skepticism and cautiousness?

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The *king's right-hand man responded* in disbelief. His words dripped with skepticism and cynicism: *even if* God Himself were to intervene, *could this really happen?* Could food really be cheap and plentiful in just twenty-four hours? He did not believe so.

As we sometimes do, he was speaking out of his own limited experience and understanding. He knew the king was unable to alleviate the people's suffering. If the king could not do anything, then surely nobody could.

Comparing Elisha with the king's right-hand man, what we see is a stark contrast between scarcity and abundance—insufficiency versus plenty—of food, belief, and ability. Elisha proclaimed that the king's right-hand man would see the abundant food with his own eyes, but he would not enjoy any of it.

**How might our personal and past experiences sometimes cause us to doubt the promises of God?**

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## **DESPERATE** [2 KINGS 7:3-8]

<sup>3</sup> Now four men with a skin disease were at the entrance to the city gate. They said to each other, "Why just sit here until we die?" <sup>4</sup> If we say, 'Let's go into the city,' we will die there because the famine is in the city, but if we sit here, we will also die. So now, come on. Let's surrender to the Arameans' camp. If they let us live, we will live; if they kill us, we will die." <sup>5</sup> So the diseased men got up at twilight to go to the Arameans' camp. When they came to the camp's edge, they discovered that no one was there, <sup>6</sup> for the Lord had caused the Aramean camp to hear the sound of chariots, horses, and a large army. The Arameans had said to each other, "The king of Israel must have hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to attack us." <sup>7</sup> So they had gotten up and fled at twilight, abandoning their tents, horses, and donkeys. The camp was intact, and they had fled for their lives. <sup>8</sup> When these diseased men came to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent to eat and drink. Then they picked up the silver, gold, and clothing and went off and hid them. They came back and entered another tent, picked things up, and hid them.

### VERSES 3-4

Speaking through Elisha, God promised that the famine would be over within twenty-four hours. What the Lord did not foretell, though, was how He was going to do that. As He often does, God worked in an unexpected way and through unexpected people. The unexpected people were *four men with a skin disease*. They were seated outside *the city gate*.

### ***God works in unexpected ways and through unexpected people.***

Being at the city gate, the four men had front row seats to what was happening in Samaria. They knew that inside the city was a *famine* and outside was the *Arameans'* military camp. They reasoned that entering the city would mean dying of starvation, and staying at the city gate meant they would also die, likely of exposure, hunger, or by an Aramean arrow. Their only hope of survival was to surrender to the Arameans, thinking maybe the Arameans would let them live rather than kill them. They were willing to take the risk.

We find examples throughout Scripture of individuals in seemingly horrible situations that the Lord ultimately used for His glory: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace; Daniel in the lions' den; Paul in a Philippian jail; or John exiled to the island of Patmos. We can add to that list four unnamed lepers at the city gate at Samaria. These examples can motivate us to ask, when we find ourselves in an awful situation, "How might the Lord use this in a way that brings Him glory?" We should always be alert, looking for ways God is working to bring about good even in the most desperate of situations. (See Rom. 8:28.)

**How can desperate times place people in a position to see God work? What are some ways God works in both ordinary and extraordinary fashion?**

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### VERSES 5-8

God's timing is always perfect. The four approached the *Arameans' camp at twilight* from one direction after the soldiers had fled in the opposite. The military combatants left as God caused them to

*hear the sound of approaching chariots, horses, and a large army.*

The Aramean military reasoned that Israel's king had hired Hittite and Egyptian soldiers to attack their camp. The Hittites would have come from the north and the Egyptians from the south. Evidently, the Arameans felt surrounded. Panicked, they *fled for their lives*, leaving behind their supplies. When the four lepers arrived, they discovered *the camp was intact* but abandoned.

Can you imagine the lepers' conversation as they discovered the abandoned tents? Inside they found food and drink, *silver, gold, and clothing*. These four who had been desperate, ostracized, hungry, and destitute suddenly found themselves filled and amazingly wealthy! Making multiple trips, they *went off and hid* their newfound riches some distance from the Aramean camp.

**When have you dreaded a situation and realized later that the Lord had already taken care of it before you ever arrived? How did that situation compare to the experience of the four lepers?**

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## **ANNOUNCED** (2 KINGS 7:9-11)

<sup>9</sup> Then they said to each other, "We're not doing what is right. Today is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until morning light, our punishment will catch up with us. So let's go tell the king's household."<sup>10</sup> The diseased men came and called to the city's gatekeepers and told them, "We went to the Aramean camp and no one was there — no human sounds. There was nothing but tethered horses and donkeys, and the tents were intact."

<sup>11</sup> The gatekeepers called out, and the news was reported to the king's household.

## **VERSES 9-11**

The four lepers were concerned about avoiding *punishment*. Keeping the *good news* to themselves was not right. If they withheld it, they were certain they would be punished. They thus decided to *go tell the king's household*. The Arameans had left the camp in a rush because of fear. The four lepers likely also left the camp hurriedly—but to announce good news.

There is a biblical principle at work here: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be expected” (Luke 12:48). As God’s people, we are stewards of what God has entrusted to us. What He has given to us, He intends to give through us to help others. Whether education, riches, time, or resources, we are to share what God has given to us.

*The diseased men* returned to Samaria and reported the *good news* of what they had found. Their news spread from the city gate to *the king’s household*. The outcasts became the bearers of good news and hope.

**What are the dangers of failing to share with others the news about God’s provisions?**

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#### **KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship**

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. (See Deuteronomy 8:18; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2.)

#### **SKEPTICS** (2 KINGS 7:12-15)

<sup>12</sup> So the king got up in the night and said to his servants, “Let me tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know we are starving, so they have left the camp to hide in the open country, thinking, ‘When they come out of the city, we will take them alive and go into the city.’” <sup>13</sup> But one of his servants responded, “Please, let messengers take five of the horses that are left in the city. Their fate is like the entire Israelite community who will die, so let’s send them and see.” <sup>14</sup> The messengers took two chariots with horses, and the king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, “Go and see.” <sup>15</sup> So they followed them as far as the Jordan. They saw that the whole way was littered with clothes and equipment the Arameans had thrown off in their haste. The messengers returned and told the king.

## VERSES 12-15

The story began with Elisha offering hope: the next day food would be plentiful and cheap. The king's right-hand man responded with skepticism: "Look, even if the LORD were to make windows in heaven, could this really happen?" (v. 2). The lepers' good news reached the royal palace. The response again was skepticism—this time from *the king*. He was certain this was an Aramean trap to lure the people of Samaria *out of the city*.

A servant presented a "what have you got to lose" type of proposition to the king. Few horses survived in the city. Death by starvation was looming. At worst, what they might lose would be a few horses, chariots, and drivers. Risking the few might save the city.

Recognizing the logic, the king dispatched *chariots with horses* and riders and gave simple instruction: *Go and see*. They *returned* and reported to *the king* what they had seen. The skeptics were proven wrong; the lepers' report was accurate.

**What keeps skeptics from investigating the truth of the gospel for themselves? How can we take a gentle approach when we share our faith with them (2 Tim. 2:24-26)?**

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The epilogue of the story is that Elisha's prophecies came true. The people of Samaria "went out and plundered the Aramean camp" (v. 16). Afterward, food was plentiful and inexpensive. It sold for the exact prices that Elisha had foretold (see vv. 1,16). Indeed, God had worked in an unexpected way and through unexpected people to bring about His will.

This Old Testament story reminds believers of the necessity of sharing our faith. Because of our own salvation experience, we know, "Today is a day of good news" (v. 9). We have a responsibility to share with others the goodness and grace of God. Some have defined evangelism as simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. That is what the lepers did. That is what we are to do as well; we are to tell.



## APPLY THE TEXT

- Doubts in God lead to missed opportunities.
- God provides in unexpected ways.
- Believers have a responsibility to share with others about God's grace.
- People must be given an opportunity to investigate God's grace.

**What opportunities in the past have you missed because of doubts? What lessons did you learn that impact how you view God's promises today?**

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**Twice the lepers talked to each other when facing challenges. Who has God provided in your life to help you face a life challenge? How were they an unexpected provision? Thank God for the counsel of others in your life.**

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**Who do you know who needs to hear the good news of God's deliverance and grace? Discuss with your Bible study group what you can do as a group to reach these people with the gospel. What one action will your group take because of this discussion?**

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### PRAYER NEEDS

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