

We have a lot of ground to cover this week.

Last week, Rachel walked us through the story of Naboth, the battle for Ramoth Gilead in which Ahab dies, the death of Elijah, and Elisha's taking up of the calling of prophet after Elijah.

Kings is a rich interesting story that continues to wind into strange paths.

I think we can infer a few things so far — the madness and arrogance of men leads to death, the prophets have a lonely and hard road, and God is still present, still working on behalf of people, still patient, longsuffering, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love as the Psalms tell us he is.

This week we'll be in 2 Kings chapters 3 to 8. And like I said before, we have a lot of ground to cover.

Chapter 3 opens with another battle involving northern and southern kingdom. Jehoshaphat is still king of the southern kingdom and Ahab's son has taken the throne in the northern kingdom. As the story goes, sin isn't creative. It's repetitive. And Ahab's son Jehoram is no different than his father. Same well-beaten path of sin and he just walks in that way. I always think it's interesting to me that people seem so afraid to catechize their

children. there's almost this fear or cultural pressure that says if you're teaching your children what's true, or giving them scripture to memorize, or giving them Kingdom-based principles to live by, that you're just brainwashing them. "Let them think for themselves"...but here's the thing, look at this repetition of wickedness. Repetition happens. And parents have the responsibility to be a part of if you're not doing that, then the well-worn path of sin will still be there for their feet. And if sin isn't brainwashing, I don't know what is. It's numbing. It's boring. It's not creative. It's not God-breathed. It's not fresh. It's the same garbage recycled generation after generation. Jehoram is disciplined in his father's sin and he walks in that path, running the rut further into the ground. This is no different than learning to walk in the ways of the Lord. but one leads to life. And one death.

Moab rebels against Jehoram of the northern kingdom. Jehoram seeks the help of Jehoshaphat. And Jehoshaphat responds with the same language he did with Ahab. It's a reminder that they are all God's people. A call back to covenant language. My people are your people. My army your army. Jehoshaphat understands that this divided kingdom isn't God's plan, isn't how God's people operate. An assault on Israel's left arm is an enemy to Israel's right arm. Jehoshaphat wants to keep peace with Israel and the northern kingdom.

Again, Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet, just like he did with Ahab. And they bring him to Elisha. They said Elisha, “who poured water on the hands of Elijah.” This is significant. It tells us how Elisha served Elijah humbly while he shadowed him. Pouring water on his hands is a ministry to Elijah that Elisha performed.

Elisha doesn't want to give Jehoram the time of day but 2 Kings 3 says because of Jehoshaphat he does. As one commentator said “If you receive any benefit from God, it is because you stand next to the Davidic king — Jesus, the descendant of David and Jehoshaphat”

A musician comes to play and as he does, the spirit of God comes to Elisha and he says “Thus says the LORD, ‘I will make this dry streambed full of pools.’ 17 For thus says the LORD, ‘You shall not see wind or rain, but that streambed shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your livestock, and your animals.’ 18 This is a light thing in the sight of the LORD. He will also give the Moabites into your hand...”

I love that the Lord answers first with provision for his people before he talks about the battle. Jehoram just wants to fight in a battle. But God's concern and care is for his people. So he says he'll meet their physical needs, a light thing, and then he'll give them victory over the Moabites.

And then the story switches to follow Elisha, who is doing some miracles among the land, not that much unlike Elijah.

We see him provide for a widow, a wife of a prophet who has died. And to add insult to injury, the creditors have now come for her sons. Probably some kind of indentured servitude. Their time, their lives would pay off whatever the widow owed. She owes a lot. Elisha tells her to borrow jars and pots from her neighbors. Note that the provision from God for her isn't an isolated thing. She needs community. Without their generosity toward her, she wouldn't have that many jars. She gets as many as she can, Elisha tells her to fill them with oil, and she fills them until she has filled the last jar. Had she more jars, she would've have more oil. This isn't an indictment on her, but an arrow pointing to GOD's generosity. He's ready to give more. She has enough to sell the oil and pay off her debts.

God shows up to provide a provision out of a debt that cannot be paid.

Then we see that Elisha builds a friendship with a Shunnamite woman and her family. So much that they feed him whenever he comes to town and they eventually build a small little apartment for him to stay in. This is wild hospitality. We have a friend who lives in another country and every time he's home, we insist that our home

is open. We feed him but have yet to build an apartment for him off the back of the barn. It's extremely generous.

Elisha knows this is generous. So he asks — what can I do for you? His servant Gehazi makes him aware that she has no children and her husband is old. So Elisha speaks that by the time he visits next year, she'll have a child. She responds like a few other women we see in scripture when their barrenness is given a promise. "Don't lie to me," she says. This is too great a thing to promise lightly.

But God does it. God shows up to breathe life into something that humanity thought was dead.

And then, the child grows. Years and years have passed, the child has grown up and is working in the field with his father, complains of a headache, goes to rest against his mother, and died. And mom wastes no time taking action. A real passionate mother here. She says in 2 Kings 4:22 — Then she called to her husband and said, "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again." 23 And he said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath." She said, "All is well." 24 Then she saddled the donkey, and she said to her servant, "Urge the animal on; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you." 25 So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

She gets to Elijah and first Gehazi, Elijah's servant meets her — and he's all "IS everything ok?" "Everything is fine." She doesn't want to talk to Gehazi. She wants the man they built an apartment for to answer for this.

Not much unlike when Elijah met the woman whose son had died and she asked "What did I do to you to deserve this?"

Verse 27 — 27 And when she came to the mountain to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came to push her away. But the man of God said, "Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me." 28 Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'"

So much of this story feels familiar. I think of the woman who fell at Jesus' feet and the disciples went to push her away. I think of Jairus approaching Jesus about his dead daughter. I think of Martha meeting Jesus in the road when Lazarus died and she asked "Where were you?"

Tragedy and grief and passion moves people beyond acceptable social reactions. And you know what we don't see? Not in Elisha and certainly never in Christ — we don't see disdain for the passionate

response toward the man of God. We see compassion, grace, mercy, empathy.

This woman comes and and Elijah can sense something isn't right. Elijah follows her home and eventually raises her son from the dead.

And here we see again –Suffering isn't outside of the realm of possibility for God's people. And yet God's compassion isn't limited by decorum or rule-following. God resurrects what is dead and restores a promise of hope and a lineage for the resurrected one.

Chapter 4 ends with two more miracles — Elisha comes to Gilgal during a famine to see the sons of the prophets. These are men who are training and gathering to follow God, study the books, study history, and train for prophetic work. And in the midst of this famine, Elisha tells them to make a stew to feed everyone.

well, wouldn't you know it but that this time there was a type of gourd that was poisonous with extreme laxative powers. One of these guys doesn't know much about agriculture. He's been reading books and studying Charles Spurgeon and Calvin. Doesn't really know why in the midst of a famine, no one seems to be eating these gourds! Strange!

Well — buddy — it's because they're poisonous. So imagine the outcry is justified when they say “There is death in the pot!”

My dad puts sugar in his coffee every morning. At his house, he keeps it in a small jar next to the coffee pot. Well, a few years ago, we were all visiting my brother and his family. My brother had brewed a pot of coffee and told us all it was there for us. What none of us knew, especially my dad, was that my brother kept a jar of salt near the coffee pot for cooking. The sugar wasn't out. but again, my dad didn't know this. So he goes to make his coffee and adds a generous portion of...salt. Stirs it in. And he brought the cup to go in the car. I remember him taking one sip and spitting it out of the door.

One harmless move can destroy a recipe. Sure;y he cried out there is death in this cup of coffee.

Elisha fixes the stew with some flour.

Now commentators had all sorts of thoughts to this. Why flour? Did that actually do something chemically to the stew? Was it just sitting nearby and the easiest thing to do? Was it for show? Why couldn't he just say “It's better” and it was better?



Here's one thing we'll see with the prophets again and again — God uses things of the material, tangible world to show something that he's doing in the spiritual world. More simply put — he uses the things of earth as tools of the things of heaven.

And we can learn this — God chooses to use people, like you and me. Things that seem useless like a handful of flour. And he saves lives. He uses clay pots for his glory. Because the point isn't the clay. It isn't me and you. It isn't the flour. It's the work he's doing.

A man comes and brings bread to Elisha and Elisha tells him to feed everyone. He says — I don't have enough. Sound familiar? The Lord multiplies it and provides. This is a well-known story for Elisha so imagine the people's awe when Jesus does the same thing. Christ shows up and does all of this on top of more to show that he is God, sent by God, to do the work of God among his people once again.

So we God provides for his people despite human error. He heals what is killing us. He uses the things made of dust and earth to display his power. And where we sit to eat and realize that there is death in the pot, he takes away the death and gives us provision and life.

Chapter five opens with this —

Naaman, a Syrian commander, high-ranked, well-known, well-respected, has leprosy. Leprosy is a vicious disease.

Here is a description of what leprosy does to a person — Its symptoms start in the skin and peripheral nervous system (outside the brain and spinal cord), then spread to other parts, such as the hands, feet, face, and earlobes. Patients with leprosy experience disfigurement of the skin and bones, twisting of the limbs, and curling of the fingers to form the characteristic claw hand. Facial changes include thickening of the outer ear and collapsing of the nose.

Tumor-like growths called lepromas may form on the skin and in the respiratory tract, and the optic nerve may deteriorate. The largest number of deformities develop from loss of pain sensation due to extensive nerve damage. For instance, inattentive patients can pick up a cup of boiling water without flinching. In fact, some leprosy patients have had their fingers eaten by rats in their sleep because they were totally unaware of it happening; the lack of pain receptors could not warn them of the danger.<sup>1</sup>

And being a leper made someone unclean. They were shunned by society. Naaman is a leper and then we read this — 2 Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. 3

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<sup>1</sup> <https://answersingenesis.org/biology/disease/biblical-leprosy-shedding-light-on-the-disease-that-shuns/>

She said to her mistress, “Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” 4 So Naaman went in and told his lord, “Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.” 5 And the king of Syria said, “Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.”

Here we see this faithful young girl who remembers. She remembers the man of God in Samaria. And she has an ear with Naaman’s wife. Naaman hears of this and says he wants to send a letter to the king of Israel. Which is strange, because that’s not what the girl said. But Naaman is high-ranking, mind you. The King would likely know who he was.

5 — So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. 6 And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy.” 7 And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me.”

The king gets this letter and it likely feels like a threat. He can’t heal anyone. And here’s this commander of a massive country and if he says no, then that might mean certain war. He tears his clothes in grief and Elisha hears of this.

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.” 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha’s house. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.” 11 But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, “Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his servants came near and said to him, “My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?” 14 So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

So Elisha sends for him, Naaman shows up at Elisha’s house in this impressive form. Horses and chariots. He is a noble man of valor. He wants to make a good impression. And Elishah...he sends out his servant. Elisha is decidedly not impressed. Gehazi, his servant,

comes out to say “Elisha says wash in the Jordan 7 times and you’ll be clean.”

This infuriates Naaman. He literally says “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.” He wants a magic show. The problem is Naaman doesn’t recognize his great need. When we know our condition and our need, we won’t seek praise and honor like Naaman. We’ll seek healing. Naaman doesn’t want to follow the instructions. He wants his own rivers. His own show. But he does it anyway, and he’s healed.

Now Gehazi has been serving with Elisha for a long time, but unlike Elisha with Elijah, Gehazi is not learning as he ought to. A sharp reminder to us that proximity to the Gospel does not mean transformation of the Gospel. Naaman offers Elisha a reward for healing him. But Elisha refuses. He didn’t do it for a reward and he sends Naaman on his way. First, Elisha isn’t going to take any kind of payment that looks like an alliance with a foreign power. But more so it’s a reminder that God’s grace is not for sale. God didn’t heal Naaman because of what Naaman could do for God or God’s people. He healed Naaman out of the abundance of his grace. But Gehazi sees this and when he gets a chance, he chases Naaman down and lies. Naaman gets out of his chariot and he tells him that Elisha has a couple guests and could use some talents and changes of clothing. Naaman gives these to him.

But when Gehazi gets home, Elisha asks him “Where have you been?”

My mother asked me this once after I had snuck out of the house one night. I knew she knew. But I was desperately hoping I was wrong. I wasn't wrong. She knew. And Elisha knows. Gehazi says — nowhere.

And Elisha's response tells us about his knowledge and the gift of seeing that God has given him. He says in verse 26 But he said to him, “Did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants? 27 Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.” So he went out from his presence a leper, like snow.

Elisha wasn't with him but he saw it all. And Gehazi and his descendants now will suffer forever. A lifetime and legacy of leprosy for four talents and two outfits. Sin will not just affect you. It's trade is never even. It's not one for one. I once sat in a counseling session with Kevin Maloney and we were talking with someone who didn't see how sin was that bad. They were enjoying it. And he said — the mouse enjoys the peanut butter on the trap

too....until it snaps his neck. And this act of deception and greed from Gehazi snaps his neck.

we see another miracle as chapter 6 opens. A man loses an axe head in the water and cries “It was borrowed!” Again, Elisha calls for a material world substance to be used — a stick, and the iron floats. Why? Why include this? Why do this?

Because God doesn't just care about the big battles and the long-term game. He cares about the faithful man who is trying to build a home and can't afford an expensive iron axe so he borrows one and then he loses it. God cares about that and that provision and that work and that cost. He cares about the commander of the Syrian army and the nameless Shunamite woman and the King of Israel and the son of the prophet who lost his buddy's axe. He sees. He cares. He provides.

Here we have this really strange story of this battle between the Syrians and the Israelites. Scripture tells us that the king of Syria would make these private plans for where he would camp out, and Elisha would know of them because the spirit of God revealed it to him. And Elisha would tell the King of Israel.

The King of Syria catches on because he can never seem to get an upper hand on Israel. AND he asks his men — who is for Israel? One

of you is a spy. And one of his men replies in verse 12 — None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.

I mean, that's not good news for the king of Syria. This means Israel has an ace up their sleeve. And perhaps they've heard of Elisha since he had healed Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army. Clearly, that has been forgotten and is no longer a point of reference because the King of Syria wants to kill Elisha.

And he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and seize him." It was told him, "Behold, he is in Dothan." 14 So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

15 When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16 He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Elisha isn't nervous at all. The army of God surrounds him and the servant sees this. God is not sitting passively by. And Elisha knows



this. He can sleep and rest at ease, knowing God is for him and his people.

18 And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, “Please strike this people with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.

19 And Elisha said to them, “This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.” And he led them to Samaria.

He leads them to the capital of the northern kingdom — Israel. Directly to the king. And the King of Israel is like — do I just kill them all? This is too easy! Elisha says no. Have mercy. Serve them a feast. Send them on their way.

Sometimes God strikes down his enemy. Sometimes he prepares a feast for them. Thank God we are in the latter category in Christ and not the first. In him, we’re led to a place of judgment and our lives are spared.

Evidently this mercy doesn’t go a long way with Syria and Ben-Hadad comes up to siege Samaria. AND it’s a very bleak time to be alive in Samaria. There is a famine in the land and Ben-Hadad and Syria pillage Samaria to the point where a donkey’s head is expensive and they’re bargaining off dove’s dung, which is either pigeon poo or carob pods for a high price. The standard wage,

according to Dale Ralph Davis in his 2 Kings commentary, is one shekel a day. The donkey's head is worth 80 shekels for perspective. Things are bleak. The timeline isn't clear who the king is. It's likely it's Jehoram but we're not entirely sure. What we do learn from this story is a few things — things are bad, people are corrupt, and the king doesn't know how to help his people. The king is walking along the wall, probably just surveying his city.

Let's read in 2 Kings 6:28 — And the king asked her, “What is your trouble?” She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.’ 29 So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him.’ But she has hidden her son.” 30 When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes—now he was passing by on the wall—and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body— 31 and he said, “May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today.”

We see that mother's are negotiating terms to eat each other's children. There's no remorse here. They're talking about the children like they're a frozen pizza. AND one can't help but think of the two women who came before Solomon and proved his wisdom when they argued over their children. Where is the wisdom now? Where is the love for children now? Things are so bad that not only do mothers not even fight for their children, but they consume

them. Children are not valued; they're a commodity. Easily tossed aside. Easily used for selfish gain. Easily destroyed. When cultures get farther and farther from the Lord, there is a noticeable diminishing of valuing children. and we see it here.

The king tears his clothes and underneath reveals sackcloth. Well, there's only one reason anyone wears sackcloth — and it was usually a call from a prophet to repent. Humble yourselves. In Jonah 3:5 we read — Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

It's likely Elisha told the king to repent. The famine was judgment from God. Just look at Romans 1 to know that God's judgement sometimes looks like chaos and the removal of his common grace. This is that. SO it's not unlikely that Elisha told the king — repent. Humble yourself. Wear sackcloth.

The king did — kind of. He put them on but hid it. UNDER his robes and colors. this isn't humility and repentance. This is checking a box.

Repentance can at first feel embarrassing. Repentance means taking off your shiny robes and the things you're proud of and admitting I was wrong. I need rescue. I am a sinner. AND the enemy

would love nothing more for you to think your repentance can be halfway and a box you check off while you continue to impress others with your robes.

Repentance changes you. AND the only thing that covers you in repentance is the blood of Christ. Not fig leaves. Not hidden under your robes. The blood of Christ, which then ironically, put you in robes of righteousness. He does cover us. He doesn't leave us naked and exposed. But we can't get that backwards.

The king sends for Elisha to kill him. He thinks "this game of trying to get God to help us isn't working. Kill Elisha for bringing this on us." We see he doesn't get it. Elisha didn't cause this. He did. The people did. Not Elisha.

Elisha sends a word from the Lord that by the next day, food will be abundant. And the way God brings this around is very...on brand for God.

Four lepers are sitting outside the city gate in chapter 7 and discussing if they should die inside of the city or outside of it. So they say — let's go see the Syrians. We're dead either way. but when they get to the Syrian camp, it's abandoned. The Lord had caused them to think they heard a massive angry army coming for them. But who was coming? Four lepers. AND who gets to enjoy the spoils of the camp first? The lepers. The rejects of society. The ones who said, we're dead either way, are the first to feast. And because of

this, all of Samaria is provided for and has food. Ben-Hadad's army is routed from Samaria, and then Bed-Hadad gets sick. He sends his servant Hazael with 40 camels worth of gifts to Elisha to find out if he's going to recover or not.

This is so interesting to me that these kings go back and forth between hating and wanting to kill the man of God, and then seeking him for help. This is how people of this world are — hate God and reject him until something happens and suddenly everyone prays.

Chapter 8:9 —

When he (Hazael) came and stood before him, he said, “Your son Ben-hadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, ‘Shall I recover from this sickness?’” **10** And Elisha said to him, “Go, say to him, ‘You shall certainly recover,’ but the LORD has shown me that he shall certainly die.” **11** And he fixed his gaze and stared at him, until he was embarrassed. And the man of God wept. **12** And Hazael said, “Why does my lord weep?” He answered, “Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel. You will set on fire their fortresses, and you will kill their young men with the sword and dash in pieces their little ones and rip open their pregnant women.” **13** And Hazael said, “What is your servant, who is but a dog, that he

should do this great thing?” Elisha answered, “The LORD has shown me that you are to be king over Syria.” 14 Then he departed from Elisha and came to his master, who said to him, “What did Elisha say to you?” And he answered, “He told me that you would certainly recover.” 15 But the next day he took the bed cloth and dipped it in water and spread it over his face, till he died. And Hazael became king in his place.

Hazael brings the message and asks if ben-hadad will recover. Elisha answers yes, and no. He knows that Bed-Hadad would recover from this illness but Hazael is going to murder Ben Hadad. Verse 10 says Elisha says ““Go, say to him, ‘You shall certainly recover,’ but The Lord has shown me that he shall certainly die” AND he stares at Hazael until Hazael is embarrassed because he knows what he plots in his own heart. AND ELisha weeps. BEcause Hazael is going to be a ruthless king and he is going to be ruthless against Israel. What elisha describes is horrific. Things are not looking up for Israel. We see two successors come to the throne in Judah. The story is not over yet.

But Hazael is king and will mean certain destruction and misery for Israel. The kings continue to pursue wickedness. Famines, cannibalism, loss of value of lives, disease, none of these things seem to be making a difference. They are running headlong into the fire and judgment.

And yet God pours out mercy on the lepers. On the widows. On the poor. On the men who make bad stew. Who borrow axes because they can't afford one of their own. On children who die. On enemy camps. God is not absent. He shows mercy and also brings judgment. He calls to them through the prophet to repent. He spares them from enemy armies by sending his own phantom, invisible armies to scare them off. And yet they reject him again and again and again.

Lord, help us to be more like the lepers who know we're lepers than the king who hides his sackcloth. Create in us clean hearts. Help us to obey the calls to repentance. Help us to trust you when we can't see your victorious arm. Help us to value what you value, and to take cover in Christ.