

The Visions of God's Strength


SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God opens people's eyes to see the spiritual realities around them so they will trust in Him.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: 2 Kings 4–8

Bible study should always involve asking good theological questions:

- 1) What does this passage teach me about _____?
- 2) What does this passage teach me about _____?
- 3) How does this passage point me to _____?

Our Bible study must also involve *prayer for illumination*. We should pray for God to open up our eyes to understand the truth of Scripture and its purpose for our lives.

 What must be true about God to justify this approach to Scripture?

Group Time

Point 1: God's servant sees that which is unseen by others (2 Kings 6:8-16).

⁸ Once when the king of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants, saying, "At such and such a place shall be my camp." ⁹ But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are going down there." ¹⁰ And the king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God told him. Thus he used to warn him, so that he saved himself there more than once or twice.

¹¹ And the mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing, and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel?" ¹² And one of his servants said, "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." ¹³ 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."

The king of Syria likely waged war against Israel for personal pride or the pride of his gods. But the king of Syria had heard of and witnessed God's grace: First, *God blessed the Syrians with success*. Second, *God blessed them with a miracle and an example of salvation*. Third, *God blessed them by crushing their pride*. Still the king refused to respond with repentance and faith in the God of Israel.

God sought to humble the Syrian king by frustrating his war plans. The account is humorous to read as the king thinks he has a spy or traitor on his team. How else could the king of Israel know his every move? Because the all-knowing, all-seeing God passed along the information. Though many miles away, God granted Elisha the secret, unseen counsel of the Syrian king, and He also protected His servant in unseen ways, making Elisha fearless before the threat of the Syrian army sent to get him.



What does this text teach us about God's sovereignty over the nations?

Point 2: God's servant prays for the eyes of others to be opened (2 Kings 6:17-20).

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. 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.

²⁰ As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw, and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

Elisha saw what his servant could not see, so he prayed for the assistant's eyes to be opened to the reality of God's unseen protection surrounding them. God opens eyes for people to see His grace (Ps. 146:5-10). He also gives unseen protection to His people (Ps. 91). Jesus Himself knew and lived under the invisible protection of the Father until the hour came for His crucifixion. God is a refuge for His people to deliver them (Ps. 46:1-7; 50:14-15,23). But we need eyes to see it and hearts to believe it (Ps. 27:1-6).



What are some ways eyes need to be opened today?

Our sovereign God answers prayer; He hears the cries of His saints. Allow this passage to encourage you in your prayer life. Pray for protection, pray for others, and pray for eyes to see the beauty of the gospel in Jesus Christ, both for salvation and sanctification.


Regeneration: Takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the _____, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. It is a work that human effort is _____ to produce.

Work of the Holy Spirit in Life of the Christian: The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in the work of _____ in bringing a person to faith in Christ and is continued through the work of _____ in helping the Christian to become progressively more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life.

Point 3: God's servant calls for mercy and grace (2 Kings 6:21-23).

²¹ As soon as the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down?" ²² He answered, "You shall not strike them down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." ²³ So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel.

Elisha instructed the king of Israel to show mercy and grace to the Syrian army. Imagine the Syrian king's reaction: "Did you capture Elisha? Did you slay him?" "No, he captured us, fed us a feast, and let us go!" God was slaying the pride of the king, showing him the folly of opposing the real King of all the earth and His prophet.

 What are some ways in which the world responds to enemies?

Why would God, the King of all the earth, treat His enemies like this? He gives living examples of His supremacy, power, and transforming grace to humble the proud so they will turn to Him. The God who protected Elisha, His servant, and Israel would have protected Syria also, if they had sought refuge in Him. The shelter of God is available to all who turn to Him in repentance and faith. But despite the Lord's patient kindness, the Syrian king refused to bow the knee to Yahweh.



Voices from Church History

"Our calling is a different calling: it is to exhibit God and His character, by His grace, in this generation. We need to show Him forth as personal, as holy, and as love."¹

—Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984)

How do you tend to treat those whom you consider enemies?



Outright Hostility

Passive Aggression

Patient Kindness

 Why should we strive, in the Lord's strength, to show patient kindness to our enemies?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read 2 Kings 6:1-16

At first glance, the opening story in chapter 6 seems unnecessary. Who cares about a floating ax head? Well, someone cared about it! We aren't given his name, but one particular prophet would never forget this story about God's miraculous provision.

God cares about world events, and He cares about giving us daily bread—or even a lost ax head. Be encouraged by this fact. This was a simple need, but it was a real need. Indeed, this is the type of care and provision Jesus ascribed to God in the Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matt. 6:31-34)

We can take every care to God as we seek to fulfill His will for our lives. He is a God you can call out to in your emergencies and trust that He provides for His children. He may provide in “mundane” ways or “miraculous” ways, but either way, it comes from our good and gracious Father (Jas. 1:17). Trust Him. Seek Him. Believe He responds to our cries. God's servants can rely on God to supply their needs.



What needs do you have today? Bring your petition to the Father.

Day 2: Read 2 Kings 6:17-20

One of the most basic prayers we can offer is that God would open up the eyes of people to see the truth of the gospel. Elisha prayed for his servant to see, and God answered this prayer, enabling the servant to see horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (v. 17). Then, once in Samaria, Elisha prayed for the Lord to open up the eyes of the Syrians (v. 20). God also answered this prayer, enabling them to see that they were in the middle of Samaria.

When Jesus was on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, we read that Jesus gave two disciples a Bible study about the Old Testament, explaining how all of Scripture points to Him. Luke adds that in this process, Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). We too need to give ourselves to the careful study of Scripture, and we too need the Lord to open our eyes that we may behold wonderful things from His Word (Ps. 119:18).



What family members and friends can you pray for by name that their eyes would see the beauty of the gospel?

Day 3: Read 2 Kings 6:21-23

This remarkable story highlights the kindness of the prophet, who reflected the kindness of our God. Instead of having the king of Israel kill the raiders of Syria, the prophet told the king to feed them. A feast was prepared for the raiders before they were sent home. Following this dramatic turn of events, you would expect to see the heart of the king of Syria melt before the God of grace. But that didn't happen (v. 24). He hardened his heart against God.

Sadly, despite being blessed by Yahweh, many refuse to acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior. Every gift and success that a person has comes from the hand of God, Maker of heaven and earth. In response to God's revealing grace, Paul says that people sinfully exchange the glory of the Creator for created things. Because they suppress the truth revealed to them, they're without excuse and therefore condemned (Rom. 1:18-25). When it comes to proclaiming the gospel, since we're dealing with hardened human hearts, we must pray for God to open eyes and transform hearts if anyone is to repent and believe and thus go from being condemned to being saved by divine grace.



How does God display His kindness and grace to the unbelieving world today?

Day 4: Read 2 Kings 6:24-32

The context of this story involves war and famine, which probably was the result of Israel's unfaithfulness. Syria executed a full invasion on Israel. Because their siege on Israel lasted for an extended period of time, the conditions were terrible in Israel. Some were selling donkey's heads and dove's dung for ridiculously high prices (v. 25).

The poor were so driven to desperation that some were eating human beings (v. 28). This particular story isn't only pitiful physically; it's also pitiful morally. Notice that the issue wasn't with eating a child but in the failure to keep a mutual agreement.

In response, the king was distressed. In anguish, he tore his clothes, a symbol of repentance (v. 30). Because this was a story of divine judgment, it would have been right for the king to repent. However, Joram (or Jehoram) didn't have a real heart for repentance. As we read next, he didn't patiently trust in and wait on God for deliverance. He acted like his mother, Jezebel, seeking to kill the prophet. He may have had sackcloth on the outside, but that didn't make up for his unrepentant heart.



Have you ever practiced false repentance? What hinders your true repentance at times?

Day 5: Read 2 Kings 6:33–7:20

Elisha proclaimed deliverance, but the captain responded with a cynical, unbelieving heart. Elisha told the captain that he would see God's provision and the people would eat, but he would not eat any of it, for he would die. Enter the four unnamed lepers.

Shockingly, when the four lepers got to see the Syrians' camp, they found no Syrians. The Lord made the Syrians hear the sound of a great army, so they fled. The lepers eventually went and told the king's household the news. But the king didn't believe it. Then one of the king's servants proposed a reasonable solution: send some men to check it out, and these men found the lepers' story to be true.

Elisha's words then came to pass, including what he said about the captain. The rushing mob "trampled him in the gate" and he died (vv. 17,20). God takes unbelief seriously and puts it to shame as He brings to pass His plans and purposes in the world.



Are you hesitant to believe the promises of God? Why or why not?

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A Word from the Editor



Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

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