

# The Book of Kings | God, the Government and the Gospel

## *The Invisible Army*

Second Kings 6.8-23

12.1.24 (Jonathan's Ordination)

*Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, "In such and such a place shall be my camp."<sup>9</sup> The man of God sent word to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there."<sup>10</sup> The king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice.*

*<sup>11</sup> Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?"<sup>12</sup> One of his servants said, "No, 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."<sup>13</sup> So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan."<sup>14</sup> He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.*

*<sup>15</sup> Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"<sup>16</sup> So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."<sup>17</sup> Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, **open his eyes that he may see.**" And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.<sup>18</sup> When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.<sup>19</sup> Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria.*

*<sup>20</sup> When they had come into 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.<sup>21</sup> Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?"<sup>22</sup> He answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those 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."<sup>23</sup> So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.*

We've been looking at the life of the Old Testament prophet, Elisha. And today we come to a story about... Perception. It's about how people see the world, how we interpret reality. It's a story about awakenings... about eye-openings ...and seeing beyond the concrete and obvious.

**Let's look at: 1) The decisive action or turning point in the story. 2) The key result of that decisive action 3) The FINAL outcome foreshadowing of the Ultimate outcome.**

It was a time for war... nations mobilizing and moving armies. It was a time for saber-rattling and secret military maneuvers and espionage, a very ominous passage.

But the history is recorded with a specific emphasis on humor, on irony and the unexpected. And when we talk about the decisive action in this "Book of Kings" that action is not initiated by one of the great kings or one of the great generals but by an unnamed servant who asks a fearful question: "What are we going to do?"

The action itself isn't a declaration of war or an act of heroism or diplomacy; it's a surprising, simple, believing prayer. The unnamed King of Syria is terrorizing the people of Israel. But God, the All-Knowing, reveals each plot to Elisha the prophet who tells the king of Israel (also unnamed) and therefore each attack is not only anticipated but consistently thwarted. It's funny.

The King of Syria is absolutely stumped. He concludes there's a mole or double-agent in the palace.

But when he's told that truth that the God of Israel tells all the King's secret thoughts to His own prophet, Elisha, the King sends "a great army" to kidnap this "secret weapon." And once again, we're convinced that THIS is the weighty stuff that changes things: what governments do, what militaries do, what the global markets do and the diplomats and heavy-hitters.

But the writer wants us to see with growing clarity, as the book unfolds: "the real action is not what the kings and politicians and generals do – it's God's word that moves history along to God's desired ends."

Looking at the army circling the city of Dothan (sharks) and come to kidnap Elisha, the servant is aghast and says, "Oh... Sir... What are we going to do?"

And the man of God gives two words: 1) Do not fear 2) WE are more than THEY. Then, the real decisive action: HE PRAYS, "Oh Lord, I pray, open his eyes to see."

It's like he wants his assistant, and the readers to know: it's NOT kings and militaries and politicians, philosophers, celebrities that determine history – it's the Word of God.

Elisha prays and God gives the Word and the servant sees what's really moving world events. Eugene Peterson, who was a real master of prayer and the Word, he wrote about the phrase in Psalm 46, "*be still and KNOW that I am the Lord*" (v. 10) Peterson reminds us that the word for "KNOW that I am God", "know" is the Hebrew word "YADA" ( יָדָא ) that's found in Genesis CH 4, "*Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain...*"

In other words, that word, "KNOW that I am God" is also the word used for the most profound act of human intimacy, the sexual union between man and wife. And Peterson extends the logic of this to say that the act of prayer is also a kind of creative act. God uses the sexual act to bring life into the world and He uses prayer to move history – believing prayer unfolds the plan of God. As this is a sermon AND a charge to the new minister, I remind him (and MYSELF!) of this crucial truth – intimate prayer is how true ministry takes place.

Second, look at the key result of this decisive action. There are a number of unlikely actions and elements in the story, but the PRAYER is for an "eye-opening" – Elisha wants his assistant to know the true nature of reality... it's more than meets the eye!

It's an urgent message for US, especially for materialistic Westerners who are convinced that science moves the world and that the problems people talk about and that have everyone worried and anxious will eventually be rectified by science. Even we, spiritual and religious, Western Christians, so allured and hypnotized by technology and by what we see... are often what Stephen Charnock called "*practical atheists*", ready to confess the Apostles Creed but also living as if what we see and observe and scientifically prove is all there is.

And... I like science. I like learning and technology (in fact, I got this sermon from Chat GPT!) but it's not Elon Musk or Vladimir Putin or Taylor Swift or "*machine learning*" (and advanced statistical algorithms that can

learn from data and generalize to unseen data)... It's not China and Taiwan or Russia and Ukraine and Harris and Trump... it's not Hollywood (I mean the fake one) or Washington DC or the NASDAQ that move the world.

All these are secondary causes. God is the Primary Cause, the Invisible Hand and the Inaudible Voice of God that's made audible by His prophets. There's an unseen world, "*principalities and powers, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*" (Col. 1.16).

It seems that we either ignore these realities or we obsess on them and see a devil behind every bush. Writing about demonic forces in our world, C.S. Lewis famously wrote, "*They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.*"

But the truth is... in the West, we tend toward materialism and in the Western Church we tend toward materialism, we live as if scientists and politicians, celebrities and technology and executives are calling the shots... We fixate on technique and on our own abilities as if... we're in control or as if it all depends on us. As we've seen, sometimes the crises and calamities that seem like the end... turn out to be a new beginning!

But believers in Jesus Christ can and must live squarely in this impossible tension – recognizing the means God uses AND set on the Truth that "*Tho' the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.*"

We, of all people, can and must be neither materialists nor magicians – we have seen that the invisible world has become visible in a Man, who is Himself "*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,*" the King of kings, "*whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things have been created through Him and for Him.*" (Col. 1.15-16)

When we were huddled... fearful, terrified by the state of the world and more-than-a-little nervous about the future we leave to our children, when we finally faced ourselves and each recognized his/her guilt before a Holy God (infinitely indebted)... When we saw that we were dead in our sins and yet walking in sin and unable to stop and... we learned that there was a Usurper, a fierce and malicious network of unseen evil arrayed against us and determined to drag us, with them, into everlasting misery... a "*prince of the power of the air.*" (Eph 2.1-4) When we added it all up *and came away horrified and perpetually anxious and despairing...* THEN, the invisible God showed up, VISIBLE and "*He canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of judgments against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the Cross.*" (Col 2.14-15)

So ... we see... that it's all much worse than we feared... but the Invisible God came. He pulled back the curtain to show us the opposition (outside us and INSIDE) and then He triumphed over our enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil. That's why we can't be pessimists. We have to be God-ward Optimists! We see the war that rages in the unseen realm, but we also see Him, "*Lord Sabaoth His Name*" – the Lord of Hosts who conquered by weakness, who healed us by becoming sick for us, who quenched our thirst by becoming thirsty, who was counted guilty that we may be called innocent and who obeyed that we might be called righteous and delightful in the sight of God.

And doesn't this episode just show us both the battle that confronts us and HIM, the Lord of hosts, our Victor!

And as the old **Pogo** cartoon showed us – "We have met the enemy and he is US!" And this passage shows us, the enemy, US!, "bedazzled" by blindness, led into the capital city like big, plump... TURKEYS! surrounded by wolves and Elisha prays a third time, "LORD, let them see?"

We can only imagine how the Syrians prisoners felt, once feared but now helpless, ashamed and about to die. And the prophet screams, “Kill them all!!”

**No!**...he says, “feed them!” The war is transformed into a party. It’s yet another picture of the Lion of Judah become the Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace, hosting His own helpless enemies (Rom 5.10) and not only forgiving us but adopting us into His own family and promising us that behind the very real and bloody battle there awaits an eternal celebration. “*And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.*” (23)

So what?

Well, if you're a believer in this King of kings... pray daily for yourself and others to have an ongoing eye-opening. I’m convinced it’s THE Key to the spiritual life, “*that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*” (Eph. 1.18)

And let’s pray...that’s what God uses to move history. Jonathan...let’s pray. It’s where the ongoing battle is won.

AND if you're NOT YET a believer in Jesus Christ: if you could PERCEIVE what stands against you... it would PETRIFY you... If you had a glimpse of spiritual powers, your own guilt and the Holy God before whom you will stand... YOU WOULD RUN TO THE SAVIOR.

So... DO. He awaits you.

Q U O T E S

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

— William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Act 1, Scene 5)

For all his marvelous creativity, Michelangelo never painted or drew or sculpted anything that compares with any newborn infant. For all his wide-ranging Renaissance inventiveness, Leonardo da Vinci never faintly approximated what any peasant couple brought forth by simply going to bed together. [“knowing” one another]. People who pray give themselves to the creative process at this same elemental, world-enriching, self-transcending place of surprise and pleasure.

Be still and know. Civilization is littered with unsolved problems, baffling impasses. The best minds of the world are at the end of their tether. The most knowledgeable observers of our condition are badly frightened. The most relevant contribution that Christians make at these points of impasse is the act of prayer – determined, repeated, leisurely meetings with the personal and living God. New life is conceived in these meetings.

— Eugene H. Peterson, *Earth and Altar: The Community of Prayer in a Self-Bound Society* (pp. 79-80)