

# GOD'S HAND IN FACING OPPOSITION

Leader pages on pp. 156-159

**THE POINT:**  
GOD IS MORE POWERFUL  
THAN THOSE WHO  
OPPOSE US.

## 2 KINGS 6:8-12,15-23

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<sup>8</sup> When the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he conferred with his servants, "My camp will be at such and such a place."<sup>9</sup> But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Be careful passing by this place, for the Arameans are going down there."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the king of Israel sent word to the place the man of God had told him about. The man of God repeatedly warned the king, so the king would be on his guard.<sup>11</sup> The king of Aram was enraged because of this matter, and he called his servants and demanded of them, "Tell me, which one of us is for the king of Israel?"<sup>12</sup> One of his servants said, "No one, my lord the king. Elisha, the prophet in Israel, tells the king of Israel even the words you speak in your bedroom."

### MEMORY VERSE

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<sup>15</sup> When the servant of the man of God got up early and went out, he discovered an army with horses and chariots surrounding the city. So he asked Elisha, "Oh, my master, what are we to do?"<sup>16</sup> **Elisha said, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us outnumber those who are with them."**<sup>17</sup> Then Elisha prayed, "LORD, please open his eyes and let him see." So the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

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<sup>18</sup> When the Arameans came against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Please strike this nation with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, according to Elisha's word.<sup>19</sup> Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will take you to the man you're looking for." And he led them to Samaria.<sup>20</sup> When they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "LORD, open these men's eyes and let them see." So the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw that they were in the middle of Samaria.<sup>21</sup> When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "Should I kill them, should I kill them, my father?"<sup>22</sup> Elisha replied, "Don't kill them. Do you kill those you have captured with your sword or your bow? Set food and water in front of them so they can eat and drink and go to their master."<sup>23</sup> So he prepared a big feast for them. When they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. The Aramean raiders did not come into Israel's land again.

### KEYWORDS

**Those who are with us (v. 16)**—Just as human armies battle in the physical world, spiritual armies wage war in this other realm. Human beings usually view life from a physical perspective, there is also a spiritual realm just as real and is populated by spiritual beings both good and evil.

**Open his eyes (v. 17)**—Elisha's request did not refer to his servant's physical eyes. He asked God to give his servant spiritual eyes to see the true reality of their situation.

**Horses and chariots of fire (v. 17)**—The forces sent by God to protect Elisha.

# HOW DOES GOD'S KNOWLEDGE AND POWER PREVAIL IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION?

When I was a teenager, I played on our church basketball team. Doyle was our center. Our arch-rival was an inner-city church. During the game, the center for the opposing team fouled out and blamed Doyle. When he walked to the bench, he pointed a finger at Doyle and said, "I'll be waiting for you in the parking lot." He was a lot bigger than Doyle and the threat had Doyle shook up.

After the game ended, our team decided we weren't going to let Doyle face the other guy alone. So, as we left the gym and walked out to the parking lot, we were one big group huddled up together with Doyle in the middle.

As believers, the opposition we face isn't always as apparent as in this story, but it is real nonetheless. Every believer engages in some level of spiritual warfare against Satan and his schemes. Thankfully, we don't stand alone. God Himself stands with us whenever we face opposition.

## He Knows Our Hidden Thoughts // 2 Kings 6:8-12

The backdrop for this passage is war. Even though this war took place long ago, it still contains the common components we're familiar with today: strategy, sneak attacks, and espionage. These same components are present in the spiritual battles believers face and they can seem overwhelming. Like Elisha, we have a powerful God who stands alongside us, and His power is displayed in His knowledge of all things.

The passage begins with the king of Aram planning a sneak attack against Israel. The attack obviously took planning and preparation, and keeping only his servants in the loop ensured the surprise attack would be successful. We can imagine the shock, frustration, and rage the king of Aram must have felt when he discovered that the king of Israel was prepared for the sneak attack. How could the king of Israel have known?

The king of Aram came to the only logical solution available. There must be a spy among his most trusted servants. They were the only ones who knew. One of his own men must have told the king of Israel his plans. But when he confronted them, he was told it was not one of them who told the king of Israel his plans but rather Elisha, the man of God.

Verses 9 and 10 reveal that God had informed Elisha of the sneak attack who then warned



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the king of Israel, preparing them in advance. But how did the servant of the king of Aram know that Elisha was responsible for sabotaging their plans? It seems the king of Aram had his own spies in place in Israel.

Accurate information is crucial in any conflict and that includes spiritual warfare. As believers, we have the benefit of knowing that nothing is beyond God's knowledge and whatever He reveals to us about the forces that oppose us, His information is always spot-on. Here's just a few samples.

### The enemy, Satan.

- He is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).
- If we resist the devil, he will flee (Jas. 4:7).
- Eventually, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

### Trials and tribulations.

- God knows how to rescue us from trials (2 Pet. 2:9).
- Serving the Lord will often include trials (Acts 20:19).
- Trials can also serve to mature us (Jas. 1:2-4).

### Temptation.

- Temptation can be caused by our own evil desires (Jas. 1:14).
- We can be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1).
- God offers us a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

### Sin.

- God tells us that we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23).
- Sin leads to death (Rom. 6:23).
- God will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

Nothing is beyond God's knowledge. God knows believers will face opposition as they live out the truth of the gospel. To help us, He has informed us about the plans of those who might oppose us.

This information can prepare us for the sneak attacks that surprise us and inform us to respond appropriately. This is one crucial way God stands with us when we face opposition.

## HOW HAVE YOU BENEFITED FROM GOD'S INFINITE KNOWLEDGE?



## DIGGING DEEPER ELISHA

Elisha, a central character in Old Testament history, lived a life and left a legacy that still has relevance for today. As the successor of Elijah, his introduction into ministry began with the transition from a modest farmer to an admirable prophet. His character described a person of obedience, compassion, and courage. On the other hand, his conduct of service portrayed one devoted to God's purposes who saw miracles in the lives of many who were the marginalized of his day. Undoubtedly, this attitude of service and humility carries on in the spirit of Elijah. Relying on God's protection in his daily journey of spiritual warfare encounters, Elisha's life is a constant offering of spiritual enrichment and insightful lessons on walking out the Christian faith.

**How might Elisha's reliance and dependence on God's protection inspire your trust in the sovereignty of God amidst personal challenges or conflicts?**

## He Opens Our Eyes to See //

2 Kings 6:15-17

The king of Aram realized that Elisha was a target that had to be neutralized. If Elisha could sabotage every war plan he devised by simply telling the king of Israel about it, his campaign against Israel would never move forward. Therefore, after receiving intel from his own network of spies that Elisha was in Dothan, he dispatched a massive army to the city under the cover of night. We're not told the specific intent of the Aramean army, but we can guess it was either to eliminate Elisha altogether or capture him and use his special abilities to aid the goals of the Aramean king. One way or another, Elisha had to be eliminated and the king of Aram sent a huge army to ensure success.

Elisha's answer sounds unbelievable at first. The declaration that the Aramean army was outnumbered lacked any visible support. If I had been Elisha's servant I would have demanded proof of this outrageous claim. Perhaps his servant did just that because we see Elisha praying for the eyes of the servant to be opened. Verse 17 states simply, "So the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

It's important for the maturing believer to develop the ability to see God's hand at work in our lives. In this situation with Elisha's servant, it was a miraculous spectacle of the supernatural power of God, but it won't always be like that for us. Sometimes we see God's hand at work simply through the way He leads us to serve Him and others.

We can also see God's hand at work when He stands with us during opposition. It's not always easy; it's usually later that we realize God's protection was at work throughout the battle. When have you sensed God's unseen protection? One of the great promises we have as believers is 1 John 4:4 which tells us, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

### WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM ELISHA'S PRAYERS IN THESE VERSES?



## He Enable Us to Bless Our Enemies // 2 Kings 6:18-23

Once again, we see the hand of God working in a powerful way through Elisha. When the Aramean army started to attack, Elisha asked God to blind them, and God did. Then Elisha convinced them they were at the wrong city and led them to the capital, Samaria, straight into the hands of the king of Israel. Once in the capital, Elisha prayed that the sight of the Aramean army be restored, and God restored their sight. We can surmise when they realized they were in Samaria, surrounded by the Israelite army, they were sure they would die.

Yet, in a great display of respect and deference, the king asked Elisha for permission to kill the Arameans. And once again, we see Elisha say something unexpected: "Don't kill them. Do you kill those you have captured with your sword or your bow? Set food and water in front of them so they can eat and drink and go to their master." It would seem that God had placed their enemies in their hands, to kill them and assert their power over them, yet Elisha commanded the king of Israel to treat the captured army with mercy, feeding them and setting them free. From the perspective of war and dominance, this simply doesn't make sense.

However, it makes perfect sense from the perspective of spiritual warfare. There are similarities between spiritual warfare and war between countries, but the differences between the two are crucial. In the sixth chapter of

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Ephesians, Paul describes those differences. They have a direct effect on how we engage in battle and what determines victory.

I can't think of anything harder than offering kindness and grace to those who have opposed me or hurt me intentionally. That's not my initial reaction. Scorched earth vengeance is more like it. Why is it hard to resist retaliating against persons who oppose us? Verse 23 gives us a clue to the wisdom of Elisha's advice to treat the Aramean army with mercy. It tells us "The Aramean raiders did not come into Israel's land again."

We have no greater example of this than Jesus Himself. Humanity ridiculed and rejected the perfect Son of God, condemning Him to die a criminal's death on a cruel cross. If anyone had the right to demonstrate vengeance and retribution, it was Him. Yet, in His kindness and grace, He offers us forgiveness so that we might be reconciled with Him and live with Him forever. In Romans 5:10 Paul said, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life."

### HOW CAN BELIEVERS BE KIND AND GRACIOUS TO THOSE WHO OPPOSE US WITHOUT COMPROMISING OUR STAND FOR THE TRUTH?

### DID YOU KNOW?

During the days of Elisha, Israel was divided into two kingdoms comprising the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Elisha served the Northern Kingdom of Israel and his prophetic ministry lasted for 60 years (892-832 BC) during the reign of four different kings.<sup>20</sup> How did Elisha's prophetic influence support the Northern Kingdom of Israel and simultaneously pose a problem for a king of the neighboring country of Syria? Due to political tensions over territory and power, Elisha would reveal some of the military strategies of the Syrian king to Israel, king Joram (2 Kings 6:8-9). Angered by the actions of Elisha, the king of Syria wanted to retaliate by surrounding the city with his vast army. Looking to and praying to God during a challenging time, Elisha saw God's powerful hand prevail in the face of opposition.

**Biblical Truth:** There is nothing that can prevail against the mighty hand of God.

**How might you apply Elisha's example in your life when faced with uncertainty or challenges?**

## LIVE IT

### How will you do to prepare to face challenges and difficulties this week?

Every believer faces spiritual battles, but our fight looks different than typical warfare. This thought is a reminder that believers stand strong in the midst of opposition by embracing that spiritual battles must be fought with spiritual weapons. Hence, sometimes the only way to stand on your feet is to fall on your knees. Consider using the suggestions below to fight the opposition that confronts you in ways that would be pleasing to the Lord.

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- **Recognize.** Study what God's Word says about God's protection. Commit a passage to memory. Recognize God will never leave or forsake you.
- **Reconcile.** Speak words of forgiveness and compassion to those who oppose you. Be merciful to them by setting aside the desire to blame. Make reconciliation the goal.
- **Rest.** Enter God's presence where you find rest (Ex. 33:14) because the battle does not belong to you but to the Lord (1 Sam. 17:47).

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. HEAVENLY DEFENDERS // PSALM 91:11-12

Thomas Blackshear, II, is a revered painter and sculptor. His work has been displayed worldwide, and his pieces come with hefty price tags. Thomas is known in part for several widely-recognized images of Black angels, including one called, "Black Angel," which depicts a haloed Black man with full white angel wings. We might not know the true appearance of angels, but we know they exist. They are God's messengers to us, and they are our defenders in spiritual warfare. Scripture tells us that God has dispatched angels to watch over and to minister to us, just as they ministered to Jesus after His time in the wilderness. Take a moment to imagine a company of angels positioned behind you when you need them most. They literally have your back.

**"For he will give his angels orders concerning you, to protect you in all your ways" (Ps. 91:11).**

## 2. BLESS YOUR ENEMIES // PROVERBS 25:21-22

Do you wish to be like Jesus? Then be a blessing to your enemies! Before you say "No," consider this: while hanging in the cross, Jesus asked His Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him because they did not realize the profound significance of their actions. Can you imagine praying for people who have just mocked and beaten you, then nailed you to a cross to die? Yet, with Holy Spirit power and love within us, we, too, can forgive and be a blessing to our enemies. Yes, you can bless the one who fired you unfairly or cheated on you or stole from you. So, what can you do even now to bless them? You can start by praying for them.

**We are called to show our enemies forgiveness, kindness and love.**

## 3. TURNED TABLES // GENESIS 47:11-12

Most know the biblical story of Joseph. His jealous brothers sold him into slavery when he was just a teenager. Joseph landed in Egypt and for a time was falsely imprisoned. But God was with him. Even as a slave and prisoner, Joseph honored God, and God gave him favor. Eventually, Joseph was elevated to

second in command of Egypt. When famine came to the land, Joseph's desperate brothers went to Egypt to buy food. They bowed to the "Egyptian" ruler as they made their request, not realizing that the ruler was their brother Joseph. Long story short, Joseph and his brothers were reunited. Joseph could have taken revenge on them, but he chose to bless them instead.

**We are all called to bless those who do wrong to us.**

## 4. NEVER ALONE // JOHN 14:16

Life is much easier when a loved one walks with us through troubling times, such as cancer treatments, relationship difficulties or unemployment. There's someone to talk to, someone to lean on, someone to cry with. There's someone to offer encouragement, strength, even a fresh and helpful perspective. Throughout the Bible, the Lord repeatedly promised His people that He would be with them. Then He proved it by providing all that an earthly friend can do and much more. God will fight for us, calm our fears, provide for us, deliver us. It's amazing that the same God who walked with Moses, Joshua and Elisha walks with each of us today through good times and troubling times.

**God is the same God yesterday, today and forever, and we are never alone.**

## 5. THE ULTIMATE EXTRA // EPHESIANS 3:20-21

The word "ordinary" conjures up thoughts of something unexceptional or usual, maybe even poor or inferior. Some of us consider our lives to be ordinary. We live the same routine week in and week out, year in and year out. Oh, for something more exciting at least once in a while! Here's some good news: No matter how ordinary we may consider our lives or even ourselves to be, we have an extraordinary God who loves us and who can and will do more than we can ever imagine. So if today is a humdrum, ordinary day, there's no need for concern. Just know that our EXTRAordinary God is about to do something extraordinary in us, with us, through us and for us.

**There is nothing ordinary about God!**



# Jesus and Elisha: A Comparison

BY ROBERT C. DUNSON

Sometimes events and people in the Old Testament prefigure similar events and people in the New Testament. Seeing the connections provides a richer understanding of how God has worked through history and strengthens our belief that God continues to work in our lives and world.

Elijah was a hairy man who wore a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8) and took on those who opposed God (1 Kings 18:16-46). Malachi stated God would send Elijah before the great day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), and Isaiah foretold the voice crying in the wilderness (Isa. 40:3). Centuries later John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching repentance, dressed in a camel-hair garment with a leather belt, and fulfilling

Isaiah's prophecy (Matt. 3:1-4). John took on those who opposed God (14:3-5), and Jesus identified John as Elijah who was to come (11:14).

Abraham placed wood for the sacrifice upon Isaac's shoulders and the two of them climbed the mountain so Abraham could sacrifice his son (Gen. 22:6). Centuries later Jesus, God's Son, took up the cross and climbed Calvary to be sacrificed (John 19:17).

The life and ministry of Elisha, Elijah's successor, prefigures Jesus's life and ministry in some ways as well. "The comparison [of Jesus] with Elisha is particularly strong in Mark and Matthew."<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14:22-33 records the narrative of Jesus walking on the water and Peter's attempt to

walk on the water and provides some points of contact between Elisha and Jesus.

The story of Jesus walking on the water begins with Him sending His disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and dismissing the crowds so He could spend time alone on a mountain praying. One can imagine that Jesus not only needed time to spend with His Father but also time away from the constant press of the crowds.

Elisha had a rich prayer life as well. When the king of Aram waged war against Israel, God consistently revealed to Elisha the king's plans. Elisha passed the information on to the king of Israel who continually thwarted the Aramean king's plans. When the Aramean army surrounded the city of Dothan where Elisha was, Elisha's servant cringed in fear. Elisha prayed that the servant's eyes would be opened, and God opened the servant's eyes so he could see God's army of horses and chariots on the mountain. Elisha then prayed God would temporarily blind the enemy army and He did. Elisha led the army to the city of Samaria where the king of Israel showed them mercy and fed them (2 Kings 6:8-23). These prayers that produced miracles indicate Elisha had a regular and rich prayer life that helped him know God and His will.

Elisha did not seek the limelight in his prophetic ministry. When he learned that the Shunammite woman's son had died, Elisha initially sent his servant Gehazi with instructions regarding how to help the boy (2 Kings 4:29). When Naaman came to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy, Elisha did not meet with him but again sent a messenger with instructions (5:10). Elisha typically worked miracles without fanfare, doing something simple or providing simple instructions for others to do (2:19-22; 4:1-7,38-44). Elisha wanted his ministry to point people to God rather than to himself.

By nature of who Jesus was, He had a higher profile than Elisha did, but He still needed time alone to be with His Father and refresh Himself from the constant pressures of His ministry among the people. Jesus also continually pointed people to the fact that His Father was working in and through Him and that He had come so they would know the Father.

Immediately after God took Elijah, Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle and struck the water of the Jordan River; the river parted, which allowed him to cross over on dry ground (2:13-14). Jesus did not split the Sea of Galilee so He could walk across it. He simply walked on the water as if it were dry ground even though the waves



Jordan River and adjacent to the traditional site of Bethany Beyond the Jordan, where John baptized Jesus. After Elijah's ascension, the Spirit came upon Elisha. Likewise, at Jesus's baptism, the Spirit descended upon Him.



were surging and the wind was howling. In parting the waters, Elisha repeated a miracle performed during the ministries of both Moses and Joshua (Ex. 14:21-22; Josh. 3:14-17). Jesus did something new and demonstrated His mastery over creation.

Elisha dealt with people who possessed limited faith. When Elisha promised the Shunammite woman a son, she did not believe (2 Kings 4:16). Naaman did not believe that something as simple as washing in the Jordan River seven times could heal his leprosy (5:10-14). The captain of Israel's army did not believe God could turn famine into plenty (7:2). Jesus also dealt with a lack of faith even among His disciples. Seeing Jesus walking across the water, they cried out in terror. When Jesus invited Peter



Interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which marks the spot where Jesus was both crucified and buried. Under the massive dome is a smaller chapel called the Edicule, which venerates the place where Jesus's body was wrapped and thereafter buried.

to walk out on the water to Him, Peter did then he became afraid and began to sink.

As soon as Jesus entered the boat, the winds ceased. This action also demonstrated His complete control over nature. God had worked miracles through Elisha that demonstrated His control over the natural world. Elisha threw salt into water to purify it (2:19-22), put meal in a stew to remove the poisonous effects of a vine in the stew (4:38-41), and threw a stick into the Jordan River making an iron ax head float to the top (6:1-7).

Once Jesus was in the boat, His disciples recognized Him as the Son of God and worshiped Him. Elisha also led people to faith in God. Naaman serves as the most famous example. After being healed of his leprosy, Naaman recognized God as the only Deity and pledged to worship Him alone (5:15-19).

Events in Elisha's life prefigured events in Jesus's life leading up to the miracle of Jesus's walking on the water. As Elijah had appointed Elisha as his successor and the sons of the prophets recognized the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, so John the Baptist pointed to Jesus, publicly baptized Jesus inaugurating His ministry, and saw the Holy Spirit descending on Him like a dove (1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:15; Matt. 3:11-17; John 1:32). Afterward, men began to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18-22). As Elisha healed Naaman of leprosy, Jesus healed a man of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-19; Matt. 8:1-4). Elisha multiplied 20 loaves to feed 100 men; Jesus multiplied 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed 5,000 men (2 Kings 4:42-44; Matt. 14:13-21). Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son from the dead, and Jesus raised a widow's son from the dead (2 Kings 4:8-37; Luke 7:11-17). Having compared this last set of miracles, one scholar stated, "Triggered by proximity and the presence of similar underlying conditions—the wailing funeral procession of a broken-hearted woman whose only son had died—Jesus's mind went back to the particulars of the Elisha story, the similarities between the stories being too striking to ignore."<sup>2</sup>



The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. It stands on the site of the three Hebrew temples: Solomon's (950–586 B.C.), Zerubbabel's (a restoration of Solomon's after return from exile in 538), and Herod's (20 B.C.–A.D. 70). It was built over a large protrusion of bedrock on the summit of Mount Moriah, which is thought to be the site where Abraham was going to sacrifice his son Isaac.

After Jesus walked on the water, He continued to do things prefigured by Elisha's actions. Elisha prayed the Aramean army would be temporarily blinded. Jesus permanently healed the blind (2 Kings 6:8-23; Matt. 20:29-34). After Elisha's death and burial, a dead man thrown into Elisha's grave touched Elisha's bones and sprang back to life (2 Kings 13:21). Jesus's death and resurrection brought forgiveness of sins and abundant, eternal life to all who believe.

The ministry of John the Baptist leading to the ministry of Jesus would have reminded people of Elijah's ministry leading to the work of Elisha. God was not repeating Himself, however. He was doing something new and greater through

John the Baptist and Jesus, but He was also demonstrating His continued action throughout Israel's history to bring blessing, healing, and life to His world.

1. Edward Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus: A Guide to the Four Gospels* (Westminister John Knox Press: Louisville, 2011), 143.
2. W. Mark Tew, *Luke, Gospel to the Nameless and Faceless* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 98.

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