

Hope in a Time of Crisis (2 Kings 6:8-23)

Big Idea: God's people are often in trouble, but God is kind and has all the resources they need.

I don't think I have to tell you that we live in interesting times.

There was a time a few years ago that I thought things were getting better. The economy was humming. Interest rates were low. There weren't any major wars. You could buy almost anything and get it shipped for free next day. I know things weren't perfect, but it was easy to feel optimistic about the direction of the world.

No more. We live in a time of what one person has called polycrisis: not just one crisis, but a series of overlapping, serious catastrophic crises: war, inflation, political upheaval, and more. It's not just in the newspaper, either. It's affecting all of us. We've barely begun to recover from the global pandemic, and we're facing a new series of crises that can make life difficult.

These are not easy days. And they're not easy days for faith either. The Wall Street Journal did a [survey](#) a month ago and found that our values are changing. People are less confident that life for their grandchildren will be better than for them. Patriotism and community values are going down. And here's something for us to consider: the percentage of people who believe that religion is important has dropped from 62% to 39%. The headline: "[America Pulls Back From Values That Once Defined It.](#)" People are losing faith in faith.

Life's not getting better. How do you hold on to hope in the age of polycrisis?

Crisis in the Age of Elisha

Let me introduce you to one of the men who served as a prophet in Israel a long time ago. His name was Elisha. He succeeded Elijah, the prophet that we met last week. He lived 3,000 years ago. He performed miracles like bringing a child back to life, multiplying a widow's jar of oil, healing Naaman from leprosy, making iron float on water, and more.

Just a reminder: we tend to think that a prophet is someone who predicts the future. Prophets sometimes did that, but that wasn't their primary role. Prophets spoke on behalf of God. They called people back to the way God had called them to live. They critiqued societal injustices and corruption among the leaders and people of Israel. They called out unethical practices and behaviors that went against God's laws.

Elisha didn't live in an easy time. Israel was going downhill fast. We read in this story: "Once when the king of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants" (2 Kings 6:8).

We don't know all the details, but we know that Syria was a formidable power. You know this because later in the story, in verse 15, Elisha's servant is terrified by the army that surrounds the city. The Syrians were continually going into Israel, killing and raiding. They'd come, burn villages, kill, enslave, and carry away the women and children. Not a very fun thing to experience.

So there's the problem. Israel is going downhill. They face a difficult situation with a powerful enemy coming against them. What do we learn from this story? Three things.

First: God's people are often in trouble.

We're almost halfway through our yearlong series through the Bible. I hope you've noticed this theme so far. There's hardly a time that God's people aren't in trouble:

- In Genesis 3, they sin and are kicked out the garden.
- In Genesis 18, they face the impossibility of the promises that God had made to them.
- At the end of Genesis, they're in captivity in Egypt.
- In Exodus to Deuteronomy, they're refugees in a desert.
- In Judges, they're threatened by the Canaanites.

And we haven't even got to the rest of the Bible yet. Things are going downhill. Soon Israel will be exiled, and after that Judah. We're in the Old Testament for another dozen weeks or so. Without revealing any spoilers, let me tell you what to expect: God's people will continue to be in trouble.

By the time Jesus arrives, Israel is a small outpost in the vast Roman Empire. There's hardly a time that Israel isn't in a state of crisis.

That's the macro view. But you can look at individuals too. Throughout Scripture, God's people seem to be in trouble. They're falsely accused. They're imprisoned. They're made slaves. They're under threat from foreign enemies. They're the victim of evil plots made against them. Over and over again, God's people find themselves in trouble.

What does that mean? When you open the Bible and find Israel being raided by Syria yet again, you could say that it's just another day in the life of God's people.

Read the end of the book of Hebrews and you discover what happened to some of God's choices servants:

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:35-38)

Being part of God's people does not exempt us from being in trouble. If you find that life is difficult – very difficult. 1 Peter 4:12 tells us:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13)

Don't be surprised at the fiery trial. Suffering is normal. In fact, God uses the suffering to shape us and make us more like Jesus. Never be surprised when you suffer in this world. God's people often find themselves in trouble.

But here's what else we see.

Second: But God is kind.

What did Israel deserve at this time? Nothing. They were on a downward path, worshipping idols and neglecting God. Every king they had in Israel, the northern kingdom, was evil. Things would get so bad that, in just a few chapters, when God judges them, the author is devastating in his evaluation of Israel:

They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them. And they abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. (2 Kings 17:15-18)

What reason did God have to come to Israel's aid in the middle of being attacked by the Syrians? They certainly didn't deserve it. But look what happened. Verse 8 says that the king of Syria would take counsel with his advisors. Before he could act on the plans that they made, Elisha the prophet would warn the king of Israel. We read:

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." 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. (2 Kings 6:9-10)

This is extraordinary. Imagine if every time Putin made war plans, Zelensky already knew about it.

Why would God be so kind to Israel? Certainly not because they deserved it, but because it's in God's nature to be kind to his people because he is good and gracious. Imagine if God treated us as we deserve?

God loves to come to the aid of his people. He doesn't do it because we deserve it. He does it because he's gracious. We can come to Jesus knowing that he's inclined to come to our aid. He will not turn us away. He loves to help his people.

Let me give you one example from more recent history. In the 1970s, many Christians in China worshiped in house churches. They had to change locations often to avoid crackdowns. When caught, the leaders would be arrested and sent to labor camps.

At one meeting, those present had a very strong sense of Christ's love and the Spirit's presence. As the meeting concluded, a group of five unidentified individuals revealed themselves as undercover government agents and declared their intention to make arrests. But they'd had a change of heart and wanted to believe. God loves to thwart the plans of the enemies of God's people and show his grace to people who don't deserve it.

We're often in trouble. We certainly don't deserve God's help. But God loves to be gracious. Have you come to God, even though you don't deserve it, and experienced his grace and help? I hope so. He will not turn you away. You can come today and he will help you.

God's people are often in trouble, but God is kind. There's one more thing we see.

Three: God has all the resources we need.

As you can imagine, the king of Syria was ticked that his plans kept being leaked to Israel. I'd be frustrated too. He went looking for the problem and discovered that it was Elisha. So the king knew what to do: get rid of Elisha, and he could attack Israel by surprise.

So in verse 14 we read, "So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city." The mission: to eradicate Elisha. When Elisha's servant got up the next day, he freaked out. Who wouldn't? Elisha. Elisha was not freaked out at all.

He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 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. (2 Kings 6:16-17)

Sure enough, God saved Elisha from those sent to kill him. And Elisha treated them kindly. He fed them and sent them away. Even the enemies of God and his people were treated more graciously than they deserved.

Here's the lesson: God has all the resources we need. We just don't have eyes to see them. We need to pray this too: Lord, open our eyes to see your presence, your care, your power. If we could only see.

But we can. God answered Elisha's prayer and opened the eyes of his servant. God is ready to open our eyes as well to see the resources he has prepared for us.

God's people are often in trouble, but God is kind and has all the resources they need.

And so, Lord, please open our eyes. Give us eyes to see. And may we hope in you and then fear nothing else. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.