
2KINGS 6: 1 The sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "See now, the place where we dwell before you is too small for us."

The sons of the prophets wish to enlarge their dwelling-place, and go to the banks of Jordan to cut down wood, when one of them drops his axe into the water, which Elisha causes to swim, 2Kgs 6:1-7. Elisha, understanding all the secret designs of the king of Syria against Israel, informs the king of Israel of them, 2Kgs 6:8-10. The king of Syria, finding that Elisha had thus penetrated his secrets and frustrated his attempts, sends a great host to Dothan, to take the prophet; the Lord strikes them with blindness; and Elisha leads the whole host to Samaria, and delivers them up to the king of Israel, 2Kgs 6:11-19. The Lord opens their eyes, and they see their danger, 2Kgs 6:20. But the king of Israel is prevented from destroying them; and, at the order of the prophet, gives them meat and drink, and dismisses them to their master, 2Kgs 6:21-23. Ben-hadad besieges Samaria, and reduces the city to great distress, of which several instances are given, 2Kgs 6:24-30. The king of Israel vows the destruction of Elisha, and sends to have him beheaded, 2Kgs 6:31-33.

Verse 1

The place - is too strait for us - Notwithstanding the general profligacy of Israel, the schools of the prophets increased. This was no doubt owing to the influence of Elisha.

2KINGS 6: 2 Please let us go to the Jordan, and every man take a beam from there, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell."

He answered, "Go!"

Verse 2

Every man a beam - They made a sort of log-houses with their own hands.

2KINGS 6: 3 One said, "Please be pleased to go with your servants." He answered, "I will go."

2KINGS 6: 4 So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down wood.

2KINGS 6: 5 But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water. Then he cried, and said, "Alas, my master! For it was borrowed."

Verse 5

Alas, master! for it was borrowed - אהא אדני והוא שאול ahah adonia, vehu shaul! Ah! ah, my master; and it has been sought. It has fallen in, and I have sought it in vain. Or, it was borrowed, and therefore I am the more afflicted for its loss; and Jarchi adds, I have nothing wherewith to repay it.

2KINGS 6: 6 The man of God asked, "Where did it fall?" He showed him the place. He cut down a stick, threw it in there, and made the iron float.

Verse 6

He cut down a stick - This had no natural tendency to raise the iron; it was only a sign or ceremony which the prophet chose to use on the occasion.

The iron did swim - This was a real miracle; for the gravity of the metal must have for ever kept it at the bottom of the water.

2KINGS 6: 7 He said, "Take it." So he put out his hand and took it.

2KINGS 6: 8 Now the king of Syria was warring against Israel; and he took counsel with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place."

Verse 8

The king of Syria warred against Israel - This was probably the same Ben-hadad who is mentioned 2Kgs 6:24. What was the real or pretended cause of this war we cannot tell; but we may say, in numberless war cases, as Calmet says in this: "An ambitious and restless prince always finds a sufficiency of reasons to color his enterprises."

In such and such a place - The Syrian king had observed, from the disposition of the Israelitish army, in what direction it was about to make its movements; and therefore laid ambuscades where he might surprise it to the greatest advantage.

2KINGS 6: 9 The man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you not pass such a place; for the Syrians are coming down there."

Verse 9

Beware that thou pass not such a place - Elisha must have had this information by immediate revelation from heaven.

2KINGS 6: 10 The king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of; and he saved himself there, not once nor twice.

Verse 10

Sent to the place - To see if it were so. But the Vulgate gives it quite a different turn: *Misit rex Israel ad locum, et praeoccupavit eum*. The king of Israel sent previously to the place, and took possession of it; and thus the Syrians were disappointed. This is very likely, though it is not expressed in the

Hebrew text. The prophet knew the Syrians marked such a place; he told the king of Israel, and he hastened and sent a party of troops to pre-occupy it; and thus the Syrians found that their designs had been detected.

2KINGS 6: 11 The heart of the king of Syria was very troubled about this. He called his servants, and said to them, "Won't you show me which of us is for the king of Israel?"

2KINGS 6: 12 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."

2KINGS 6: 13 He said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him." It was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan."

Verse 13

Behold, he is in Dothan - This is supposed to be the same place as that mentioned in Gen 37:17. It lay about twelve miles from Samaria.

2KINGS 6: 14 Therefore he sent horses, chariots, and a great army there. They came by night, and surrounded the city.

Verse 14

He sent thither horses - It is strange he did not think that he who could penetrate his secrets with respect to the Israelitish army, could inform himself of all his machinations against his own life.

2KINGS 6: 15 When the servant of the man of God had risen early, and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was around the city. His servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

2KINGS 6: 16 He answered, "Don't be afraid; for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Verse 16

For they that be with us are more, etc. - What astonishing intercourse had this man with heaven! It seems the whole heavenly host had it in commission to help him.

2KINGS 6: 17 Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, please open his eyes, that he may see." the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha.

Verse 17

Lord - open his eyes - Where is heaven? Is it not above, beneath, around us? And were our eyes open as were those of the prophet's servant, we should see the heavenly host in all directions. The horses and chariots of fire were there, before the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened.

2KINGS 6: 18 When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Please strike this people with blindness." He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

Verse 18

Smite this people - with blindness - Confound their sight so that they may not know what they see, and so mistake one place for another.

2KINGS 6: 19 Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, neither is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." He led them to Samaria.

Verse 19

I will bring you to the man whom ye seek - And he did so; he was their guide to Samaria, and showed himself to them fully in that city.

2KINGS 6: 20 When they had come into Samaria, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." The LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

Verse 20

Open the eyes of these men - Take away their confusion of vision, that they may discern things as they are, and distinguish where they are.

2KINGS 6: 21 The king of Israel said to Elisha, when he saw them, "My father, shall I strike them? Shall I strike them?"

Verse 21

My father, shall I smite - This was dastardly; the utmost he could have done with these men, when thus brought into his hand, was to make them prisoners of war.

2KINGS 6: 22 He answered, "You shall not strike them. Would you strike 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."

Verse 22

Whom thou hast taken captive - Those who in open battle either lay down their arms, or are surrounded, and have their retreat cut off, are entitled to their lives, much more those who are thus providentially put into thy hand, without having been in actual hostility against thee. Give them meat and drink, and send them home to their master, and let them thus know that thou fearest him not, and art incapable of doing an ungenerous or unmanly action.

2KINGS 6: 23 He prepared great feast for them. When they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. The bands of Syria stopped raiding the land of Israel.

Verse 23

He prepared great provision for them - These, on the return to their master, could tell him strange things about the power of the God of Israel, and the magnanimity of its king.

So the bands of Syria came no more - Marauding parties were no more permitted by the Syrian king to make inroads upon Israel. And it is very likely that for some considerable time after this, there was no war between these two nations. What is mentioned in the next verse was more than a year afterwards.

2KINGS 6: 24 After this, Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria.

2KINGS 6: 25 There was a great famine in Samaria. Behold, they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.

Verse 25

And, behold, they besieged it - They had closed it in on every side, and reduced it to the greatest necessity.

An ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver - I suppose we are to take the ass's head literally; and if the head sold for so much, what must other parts sell for which were much to be preferred? The famine must be great that could oblige them to eat any part of an animal that was proscribed by the law; and it must be still greater that could oblige them to purchase so mean a part of this unclean animal at so high a price. The piece of silver was probably the drachm, worth about seven pence three farthings of our money; the whole amounting to about two pounds nine shillings.

And the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung - The cab was about a quart or three pints. Dove's dung, חריונים *chiriyonim*. Whether this means pigeon's dung literally, or a kind of pulse, has been variously disputed by learned men. After having written much upon the subject, illustrated with quotations from east, west, north, and south, I choose to spare my reader the trouble of wading through them, and shall content myself with asserting that it is probable a sort of pease are meant, which the Arabs to this day call by this name. "The garvancos, cicer, or chick pea," says Dr. Shaw, "has been taken for the pigeon's dung, mentioned in the siege of Samaria; and as the cicer is pointed at one end, and acquires an ash color in parching, the first of which circumstances answers to the figure, the second to the usual color of dove's dung, the supposition is by no means to be disregarded."

I should not omit saying that dove's dung is of great value in the East, for its power in producing cucumbers, melons, etc., which has induced many learned men to take the words literally. Bochart has exhausted this subject, and concludes that a kind of pulse is meant. Most learned men are of his opinion.

2KINGS 6: 26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!"

2KINGS 6: 27 He said, "If the LORD doesn't help you, from where could I help you? From of the threshing floor, or from the wine press?"

Verse 27

If the Lord do not help thee - Some read this as an imprecation, May God save thee not! how can I save thee?

2KINGS 6: 28 The king said to her, "What ails you?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.'

2KINGS 6: 29 So we boiled my son, and ate him: and I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him;' and she has hidden her son."

Verse 29

So we boiled my son - This is horrible; but for the sake of humanity we must allow that the children died through hunger, and then became food for their starved, desperate parents.

She hath hid her son - He was already dead, says Jarchi; and she hid him, that she might eat him alone.

This very evil Moses had foretold should come upon them if they forsook God; see Deu 28:53-57. The same evil came upon this wretched people when besieged by Nebuchadnezzar; see Eze 5:10. And also when Titus besieged Jerusalem; see Josephus, De Bell. Judaic. lib. vi., cap. 3, and my notes on Mat 24:19.

2KINGS 6: 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 underneath on his flesh.

Verse 30

He had sackcloth within upon his flesh - The king was in deep mourning for the distresses of the people.

2KINGS 6: 31 Then he said, "God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stay on him this day."

Verse 31

If the head of Elisha - shall stand on him - Either he attributed these calamities to the prophet, or else he thought he could remove them, and yet would not. The miserable king was driven to desperation.

2KINGS 6: 32 But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Then the king sent a man from before him; but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent to take away my head? Behold, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold the door shut against him. Isn't the sound of his master's feet behind him?"

Verse 32

This son of a murderer - Jehoram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. But Ahab is called a murderer because of the murder of Naboth.

Shut the door - He was obliged to make use of this method for his personal safety, as the king was highly incensed.

The sound of his master's feet behind him? - That is, King Jehoram is following his messenger, that he may see him take off my head.

2KINGS 6: 33 While he was still talking with them, behold, the messenger came down to him. Then he said, "Behold, this evil is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"

Verse 33

Behold, this evil is of the Lord - It is difficult to know whether it be the prophet, the messenger, or the king, that says these words. It might be the answer of the prophet from within to the messenger who was without, and who sought for admission, and gave his reason; to whom Elisha might have replied: "I am not the cause of these calamities; they are from the Lord; I have been praying for their removal; but why should I pray to the Lord any longer, for the time of your deliverance is at hand?"

And then Elisha said, - see the following chapter, 2 Kings 7 (note), where the removal of the calamity is foretold in the most explicit manner; and indeed the chapter is unhappily divided from this. The seventh chapter should have begun with 2Kgs 6:24 of this chapter, as, by the present division, the story is unnaturally interrupted.

How natural is it for men to lay the cause of their suffering on any thing or person but themselves! Ahab's iniquity was sufficient to have brought down God's displeasure on a whole nation; and yet he takes no blame to himself, but lays all on the prophet, who was the only salt that preserved the whole nation from corruption. How few take their sins to themselves! and till they do this, they cannot be true penitents; nor can they expect God's wrath to be averted till they feel themselves the chief of sinners.