

ELISHA AND THE SYRIAN ARMY

(Romans 8:31b)

Purpose: To teach confidence in God's power to deliver us from our enemies; and our obligation to show mercy and forgiveness.

Once there was a great prophet named Elisha, who lived long ago in the land of Israel. He taught the people to worship God and to obey God's laws.

In his house at Dothan, Elisha often knelt to talk to the Lord and listen to His word. There he prayed that the Israelites might be protected from their fierce enemies, the Syrians.

For a long time Benhadad, the cruel king of Syria, had been at war with the people of Israel.

Now he planned a surprise attack which he hoped would crush them once and for all.

With his mighty, well equipped army ready to fight he was sure that this time they could wipe out Israel's army.

He called the captains of his army together and they carefully planned where they would camp and how they would trap the unsuspecting Israelite army.

King Benhadad warned his men that not a word must leak out. The whole success of their plan depended on secrecy, and a surprise attack.

While the Syrians secretly plotted, Elisha stood quietly by the window of his house. Then he called his servant, and said to him:

"Go at once to our king and warn him that the king of Syria is planning a surprise attack on our army." Elisha was able to explain just where the Syrians would be lying in wait, for God had told his prophet Elisha of the Syrian plans.

The young servant raced down the long, dusty road from Dothan to Samaria with the message for the king of Israel.

He was allowed to see the king as soon as he arrived, because the king knew Elisha was a true prophet of God. And when the servant told him about the Syrian plot, the king sent orders to the captains of his army.

In the meantime the Syrian army reached the place where they planned to hide. They moved cautiously as they hid among the shrubs and trees. They thought that soon the king and the army of Israel would pass close by. But they waited, and waited, and nothing happened.

At last the captain of the Syrian army sent a messenger back to Benhadad to tell him they had waited for hours without seeing a sign of the Israelite army. *"Strange!"* Benhadad muttered. So he made new plans, making doubly sure to keep them secret.

Again the Syrian armies hid and waited, while their scouts kept a watch on the road, but there was no cloud of dust raised by approaching horses and chariots.

The king was furious when their plans failed again and again. *“There is a traitor in the camp! Which of you is giving our secrets to Israel?”* The captains cowered in fear, but then one of the soldiers remembered about Elisha and his power to work miracles.

“There is a prophet in Israel named Elisha. Nothing is hid from him. Why, he knows everything that’s going on, even before it happens!”

Now Benhadad had heard of Elisha and the God he served. He thought that if only he could take Elisha prisoner the prophet would be powerless, and they could carry out their plans. So he sent spies to the land of Samaria.

Finally, one of them found Elisha’s house in Dothan, and stood outside the window. Was that the old man who knew all their secrets and told them to the king of Israel? Benhadad wouldn’t need an army to take *him* prisoner.

But Benhadad ordered a great host of soldiers with chariots and horses to move under the cover of darkness and capture Elisha.

Very early the next morning Elisha’s young servant went to the window to open the shutters and he stared in wonder at the sight that greeted his eyes.

A great army surrounded the city. The morning sun shone on an array of shields and spears. There were chariots and horses as far as he could see!

It was the enemy, the Syrian army! Could it be that this time Elisha hadn’t known they were coming?

“Alas, master, what can we do?” the young man cried. There wasn’t a chance of escape. The Syrians surrounded them, every road and gate was blocked.

But Elisha didn’t even look worried. He said, *“Fear not. They that be with us are more than they that be with them.”*

The servant stared at him. What was Elisha talking about? They were just two defenceless men against a whole army!

Then Elisha said, *“With them is the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God.”* Then Elisha prayed that God would open his servant’s eyes. *“Go and look out of the window again.”* The young man looked...

The enemy was still there, but now he saw horses and chariots of fire standing ready to defend Elisha. Then, fearlessly, Elisha walked into the midst of the whole Syrian army.

“Smite them with blindness!” he prayed. Suddenly a terrifying darkness fell upon the soldiers. They didn’t know where they were; they couldn’t see the city or the sky or the trees.

Men shouted in fear and bewilderment, their ranks breaking in panic. *“You are going the wrong way. Follow me,”* Elisha told them quietly.

He led them right into the city of Samaria and then he prayed that their sight might be restored. The Syrians looked around in fear and terror; they were surrounded by the menacing spears of the Israelite army!

Excitedly King Joram sent for Elisha. What an opportunity! The whole Syrian army his prisoners! But he didn't dare act without Elisha's consent.

"Shall we kill them?" he asked. But Elisha would not permit the Syrian prisoners to be killed.

Instead, he told King Joram to feed the enemy soldiers, and a great feast was set before them. And when they were refreshed...

...they were sent back to King Benhadad, so that he would come to know about the power and wisdom and mercy of God.

And Elisha's young servant also learned a lesson that day. He discovered...

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that Him, and delivereth them."

As we see the faith that Elisha had in the Lord, and his unfailing confidence in God's power, we should remember that God never changes. He is just as able to protect us today. We should never be afraid, for the Bible says:

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b)