

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 21, Part 1

2 Kings 8-9, Part 1

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Hello, we're continuing our study of the Books of Kings. We have been looking intensively at the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Now, we begin with today's study to turn a bit of a corner.

We've been particularly looking in the last two or three sessions at the ministry of Elisha. And the way in which it's both positive for those who are serving God and negative for those who will not. And now there's a sense in which we're coming to the conclusion of all of that.

Let's pray before we dive in.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for our time is in your hands. You are the great God.

You are the one who rules the universe. You are the one who is love. What a joy, what a joy to think that the one in whose hands we are held is love.

Your every concern for us is for our best. Praise you. We look at the upheavals in the world. We look at the difficulties. We look at the problems. And we realize, oh Lord, that again, you're in control.

And there are things that are happening to us that are the very result of our choices in the face of what you would choose for us. Thank you, Lord, that you are not overruled by those things. Thank you for our rebellion; our failure does not present a problem for you that you are unable to deal with, control, use, and ultimately bless.

Praise you. Help us as we look at this passage of scripture today. Help us to see its truths, its eternal truths, and also help us to hear your word for us, each one of us today. And we'll thank you, in your name. Amen.

We're looking at chapter 8, verse 7 through chapter 9:13.

And they are bookended with two appointments. Remember that back in 1 Kings, when Elijah was totally depressed, fearful for his life, and running away, God said, no, no, I still have a ministry for you. I want you to do three things.

I want you to anoint Hazael, king of Syria. Remember, Syria is centered on Damascus, up there to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee. I want you to anoint Hazael, king of Syria.

Then I want you to anoint Jehu, king of Israel. And I want you to call Elisha. Many scholars wonder, well, Elijah didn't do those three things.

He only did one of them. He only anointed Elisha. He only called Elisha to follow him.

So, did he fail? Well, again, as I've said so many times, we've got to be a little careful saying what the Bible doesn't say. The Bible doesn't say that he failed. There's no sense of judgment upon him.

On the other hand, the Bible doesn't say, well, that's exactly what he was supposed to do. But I believe that by anointing Elisha, he then clearly taught Elisha what he was supposed to do because there's no sense in this passage of God giving additional instructions to Elisha.

He simply carries it out. I think that, in fact, the time was not fulfilled during Elijah's lifetime. And so, this double ministry is not the ministry of Elijah and then later Elisha, and one is better, and one is worse.

No, I believe it is a single ministry, the Elijah-Elisha ministry. And as Elisha carries out these two appointments, Hazael and Jehu, he is fulfilling God's plan for their ministry. Let's look first of all at the appointment of Hazael, king of Syria.

In verse seven, Elisha went to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, was ill. When the king was told the man of God, remember what we said all the way through here: By and large, Elijah and Elisha are not called prophets. They're called men of God.

I think that man of God runs deeper. The prophet is kind of a profession. Man of God is who they are.

The man of God has come all the way up here. He said to Hazael, take a gift with you. Go meet the man of God.

Consult Yahweh through him. Ask him, will I recover from this illness? It is fascinating that Ben-Hadad is consulting a God who is foreign to him. Remember that Ahaziah tried to consult Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, a foreign god.

But now, in this case, the foreign god has come to Damascus. I think this means that Ben-Hadad had learned some lessons from his encounters with Elisha and the encounters with his army with Elisha over the years. And so, he says, go, ask, ask if I'm going to survive this illness.

And so, Hazael went to meet Elisha, taking with him a gift of 40 camel loads of all the finest wares of Damascus. My goodness. He went in and stood before him and said,

your son, Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, has sent me to ask, will I recover from this illness? Now Elisha answers him, and he says, yes, tell him he certainly will recover.

But the Lord has revealed to me that, in fact, he'll die. Now, is Elisha lying here? Is he bending the truth? In fact, I don't think he is. Left to himself, Ben-Hadad would recover.

This illness is not final. But Elisha says, but I know he's going to die. I think this gives us an understanding of why Hazel then did what he did.

We remember that Hazael then the next day soaked a pillow and put it on Ben-Hadad's face. Yeah, left to himself, Ben-Hadad would have recovered, and Hazael would not have become king. But Ben-Hadad is going to die because Hazel is going to kill him.

He stared at him, this is verse 11, with a fixed gaze until Hazel was embarrassed. Then, the man of God began to weep. I know what you're going to do.

I see what you're going to do. Remember back in chapter three, we talked a bit about this. Elisha said you guys are going to go into Moab.

You're going to stop up every well. You're going to cover every field with stones. You're going to cut down every good tree.

Wow, was that a direction that they should do that? No, Elisha simply recognizes that's what you're going to do. Now, to be sure, that may indeed have given them the sense. Well, it's okay for us to do what we want to.

I won't quibble over that. But here again, Elisha is in no way commanding Hazel to do these things. He is simply a man who can see the future, saying, I know what you're going to do.

You're going to set fire to their fortified places. You're going to kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, rip open pregnant women. Now, I want you to notice verse 13.

I want you to notice what Hazel does not say and what he does say. Again, a mark of the man. How could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat? Now, remember, a dog in the Hebrew Bible is not man's best friend.

They are simply like vultures. They're carrion eaters. They're the ones hanging around on the edges of society.

You don't want to leave your little kid out there in the street, or the dogs will eat him. I'm a mere dog. I'm nobody.

How could I do such a great thing? He does not say, how could I do such an evil thing? He doesn't say, how could I do such a terrible thing? He says, hey, I'm a nobody. How could I do something great like that? You see, C.S. Lewis says in one of his writings, excuse me, no, it's not C.S. Lewis. It's Patrick O'Brien, the novelist.

He says that in fact, a person starts out merely human and then they become a character. Yes, yes. We are developing into who we are going to be and in the end of the days, we will not be able to be anything other than what we've made ourselves, except by a miracle of God.

Who are you becoming? Who are you making yourself into? Are you drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit? Are you living in the world? Are you living in prayer? Are you allowing God to shape the character you are becoming? Well, how can I do that? The Lord has shown me you will become the King of Aram. Again, notice he's not saying the Lord wants this to happen or the Lord is going to make this happen. It's, I've seen it, fine lines.

Fine lines between knowing something and commanding something. And so, Hazel saw his opportunity. He went back.

What did Elisha say to you? Hazel replied. He told me you'd surely recover. Left to himself, he would have.

And Hazel knows that. If Hazel is going to become king, he's going to have to take matters into his own hands. Oh my.

Again, there is a fine, fine line between simply taking our life in our own hands and, on the other hand, sitting on our hands and trusting God to do it. Hazel chose the former. I'm going to do it.

God has said, Yahweh has said, I'm going to become the next king. He's also said this old man's going to live forever. Well, I can't afford to wait around like that.

I'm going to take matters into my own hands. How easily you and I do that. You know, when a ship, a sailing ship, wanted to leave port, and the winds were light and variable, what you needed to do was wait for the moment when the tide began to turn and to ebb.

That's the moment to untie the ropes binding you to the dock and let the tide carry you out into the sea where there was more wind. And so, the poet said, there is a

moment when you must catch your tide. And if you don't, if you miss your tide, you're going to have to wait 12 hours until it goes out again.

Oh, how easily you and I fall into that pit. Oh my, this is my opportunity. I got to do it now.

No, you don't. What you have to do is to be sensitive when God says to go. Now, God may well be telling you this is your opportunity.

I'm with you. Let's go. But God is often kind of contrary.

Have you noticed that? God loves doing things out of order that demonstrate that he did it and not we. So again, Hazel, I'm going to be the next king. This old man is going to live forever.

Kill him. Did God want him to do that? Did God want him to kill Ben-Hadad? Again, the Bible doesn't say. And we've got to be a little careful, but I don't think so.

I think God had Hazel trusted Yahweh. I think God had another way of bringing this thing about. But God knew who Hazel was.

And so, by this very act, he's going to recover, but you're going to be the next king. James says we've talked about this before. James says, don't you dare say God tempted you.

Don't you dare say that God induced you to do evil. On the other hand, God does test us. He sets tests for us.

Tests which we can fail. So I don't know about Hazel, but I know about me, and I know about you. Will you trust him? Will you wait for him? Will you follow his guidance? You say, well, it's not easy.

He doesn't send telegrams. That's true. That's true.

But we can, to the best of our ability, say, God, I'm not moving until I've got a clear sense of where you're taking me. The sense may be crystal clear, right? Maybe kind of fuzzy, but in the end, we can say, I think this is what God wants. On the basis of his word, on the basis of counsel from others, on the basis of my inner impressions, all put together.

I think this is what God wants. Oh, oh, wait for it. Wait for it.

So, Hazael becomes the king of Syria. And in the next chapters of the book, we're going to see Hazel becoming stronger and stronger. Attacking Israel, even, even attacking Jerusalem.

And remember what God said to Elijah? Oh, the sin of Israel is going to be punished. And one of my tools will be Hazel. And sure enough, that's what is about to happen.