

Glen Park Gospel Church
Tuesday Evening Bible Study Group Notes

Rev Chris Trinham

Elisha

No 11

When Things Go Wrong

Second Kings 6:1-7

We do not question the record that the axehead rose to the surface of Jordan's waters. There are natural forces which under the right conditions can allow this to happen¹. That it occurred at that time is a miracle to us. It is not so to God who planned the event before the world was created. And it is but an evidence that He cares and provides for His own; which fact we do well to remember when bad things also happen to us.

This passage has been interpreted in many ways by giving the characters one or another allegorical identity. This can help our understanding if it faithfully illustrates the basic teaching of the Bible. In our approach we examine the text to see if it can help us better picture what happened on that unusual day. If we do, we will certainly discover something to encourage us in our relationship with our miracle working Lord.

First, remember that Elisha was God's representative. He as a prophet was then, in a lesser way, what Jesus is to us today². They enjoyed the time spent in his presence and sitting under his ministry, possibly in Gilgai³. The place before you, 'before your face,' is 'too tight' for comfort. Young men were being attracted to him. Their plan was to build a new centre at the Jordan to cater for growth v2.

The 'beam' or 'pole' is the word for a rafter and this paints a picture⁴. The walls would possibly be of mud brick and with a beamed roof.

The word 'axe head' is more correctly an 'iron for cutting.'

There is no mention of an handle. We assume there was because we are familiar with the idea. The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia lists various tools that fit the term⁵. While they were still felling the log it was lost into deep water.

The poverty of the Prophets. There are some clues to this. They were doing the work themselves, by the working-bee method, a commonly used money saving arrangement.

Second, the beams were inferior, harvested from the Jordan, not the quality timbers of Lebanon and the construction sited there not requiring cartage. And again, the tools were borrowed, and unprofessionally handled.

Much of God's work is done in this fashion, but God often does not call sophisticated people to do His choicest work 2 Corinthians 1:27&28.

This does not mean that God's work should be done in a slip shod way. There are two aspects, the human and the divine. The divine, only God can do, for which all He needs is faith John 6:28&29, (See the example of Jesus, John 9:47 and 14:10); 'for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure'⁵. Then there is the human part, and it is our responsibility and pleasure to offer to our Lord and Saviour the very best we can do, all our knowledge, skills training and resources, the gifts that He has put into our care to enable our profitable and effective service in the needs of His kingdom. And the tension between these strings resonates as a beautiful harmony.

But then they were wise enough to invite God's representative to accompany them v3, viz:

If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. Exodus 33:15.

The presence of the Lord in our midst makes all the difference.

Elisha knew just what to do. Now these things that happened to them were faithfully recorded, not only as Hebrew history, but as examples or lessons for us 1 Corinthians 10:11:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The Lord Jesus, our Elisha, knows what to do when we lose control of our affairs, especially when engaged in His service. This applies first of all to our sins and failings:

If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness 1 John 1:9.

It also applies to the mistakes and errors we make in our service for the Lord. As servants of the Lord we must never be afraid to put our foot awrong. Men may be reluctant to forgive and forget, but never so the Lord. He remembers that we are but dust. He knows just how frail we are. 'Where did it fall v6?' When things go wrong it is necessary to go back to

the place of the misadventure and begin again from there. God does not cover up. He deals with the error, even at great cost to Himself, and begins again. The clay which was marred in the hands of the potter must be thrown back onto the wheel and the vessel begun again!

Elisha cut a tree and cast it into that place. Your Bible says a 'stick,' but the word is the same as Exodus 15:25:

The LORD showed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet:

It is the word for 'tree'⁶. It is first used of the creation of the trees bearing fruit (Gen 1:11), The 'gallows' on which Haman was hanged is the same word 'tree.' It is the tree on which Jesus was hanged, and cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree (Galatians 3:13).

It is the cross in the life of the believer that gives us our victory. There is little difference really between the answer to our moral failings and that of our reluctance and misapplication in service.

Confession, forgiveness and renewal. And renewal is starting afresh, but with a clean slate, better knowledge and strengthened resolve to walk in the way of the tree.

End Notes: 1. An upsurge of water, or perhaps a magnetic force, etc. 2. Hebrews 1:1. 3. 2 Kings 4:38. 4. Song of Solomon 1:17 uses this word beam in this application and is a good example. 5. These include and axe, adze, bill hool, pick or chisel. Iron tools were used from before the flood (Genesis 4:22.) Carpentry tools were common in ancient Egypt including saws for ripping logs into beams and the adze for shaping them. 6. Tree, this word (Strong 6085) has the basic meaning of firmness, and is translated: tree, wood, timber, stick, gallows, staff, stock, branches, planks and stalk. (Frequency order). The wording of the NASB is used for his study, unless otherwise acknowledged.

Welcome Glen Park Gospel Church
Lower Road, Eltham North
Sundays 10.30 am

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