



THE CHURCH OF THE  
RESURRECTION  
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## FROM FAMINE TO FEAST

2 Kings 6:24-7:20

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2 Kings 6:24-7:20 is a long story with a simple message: *Trust in the word of the Lord*. The story is historical, yet it's a history lesson that's written much like a fable: there's a problem, a solution, a rescue, and a moral to the story at the end. Let's survey these four parts of the story to see how it teaches us to trust in the word of the Lord.

### **The Problem: Disregarding the Word of the Lord (6:24-33)**

The story begins in 2 Kings 6:24 with the siege of Samaria, Israel's capital city, and a tragic famine within the gates. Food and fuel prices had skyrocketed to the point that people were spending a fortune to eat unclean and unpalatable donkey heads (6:25). Beginning in 6:26, the cannibalism of the two mothers poignantly encapsulates Israel's problem. These two mothers had made a wicked pact with one another: to boil and eat their sons, first the one and then the other. But after they ate the one, the mother of the other son took him and hid him. So the mother whose son had been eaten cried out for help to the King of Israel.<sup>1</sup> She thought that she was seeking justice, but in fact what she sought was a great injustice: assistance in murdering and eating her neighbor's son.

You need to know that this episode isn't only a macabre example of how bad things had gotten. It's also the fulfillment of a solemn warning from the word of the Lord. Long before, during the time of Moses, the Lord had warned his people that this day would come *if* they disregarded his word:

*They shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you. And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress. Deuteronomy 28:52-53.*

What God had said in his word was exactly what was now happening. Why? ***Because God's people had disregarded the word of the Lord.***

You also need to know something that happened a couple of centuries prior to 2 Kings 6-7, during a much happier time at the beginning of Solomon's reign. King Solomon had asked the Lord for wisdom, and Solomon had promised to rule according to the Word of the Lord. After

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<sup>1</sup> The woman said, "*Hosanna adonai ha-melek,*" or "Help, my Lord, O king!" 2 Kings 6:26.

making that promise, two women came to him seeking justice. Both had sons, but one son had died in the night because his mother had lay on top of him. She then stole the other woman's living son, replacing it with the corpse of her own. The mother whose son had been stolen begged Solomon for justice, while the other mother denied the whole story. Having heard both sides, Solomon in his wisdom called for a sword to cut the remaining child in half and give half to each mother. The true mother chose to give up her son to the other rather than see him cut in two. With that, Solomon discerned the true mother and was able to give her back her living son—and the justice she deserved.

Solomon's just decision was a high point in Israel's history, back when God's people were united under a king who reigned according to the word of the Lord. Circumstances were radically different by the time of 2 Kings 6. Civil war had divided the country in two. Then for more than a century the kings of Israel had completely forsaken the word of the Lord, and the people were suffering because of it. The mothers' cannibalism reveals just how upside-down things had become.

Our children are our future. Solomon in his wisdom had vindicated the mother who was willing to sacrifice herself for the life of her son. In today's story, however, the mother who had eaten her own son was still hungry, and she wanted to keep cannibalizing the next generation. It's a vivid illustration of the problem that comes from disregarding the word of the Lord.

Our narrator doesn't bother to tell us what happened to the woman. Instead the spotlight remains on Israel's apostate king. Like King Ahab, his wicked father, this king had also long cannibalized Israel's future. Now the cupboards were bare. What he should have done was repent of his apostasy and return to the Lord. What he did instead was blame the Lord. He made an oath to put Elisha to death, even though Elisha had gotten him out of a number of jams in the past (6:31). Elisha wasn't worried, of course; he trusted in the word of the Lord. So when the king's assassin returned without the head of the prophet, the king said, "This trouble is from the Lord! Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" (6:33).

It's true that Samaria's trouble was "from the Lord," inasmuch as the Lord had said this would happen if they forgot his word. But Samaria's trouble was justly deserved, as the king had led the nation into it. It was God's punishment for deliberate disobedience that was not from the Lord, but from generations of leaders who disregarded the word of the Lord.

Imagine being among that future generation of God's people living during the Babylonian exile, listening to this story being told, and hearing the king blaming God for their troubles. Think of the exiles gasping and groaning in response to the king's words. He's like a murderer on death row blaming the government for his plight, saying, "I'm not the one who made murder illegal." Whenever we find ourselves suffering the consequences of our own selfishness, we have nobody to blame but ourselves.

We live in a world filled with sin and brokenness. Not every disease or difficulty that we face is the result of our own wandering from God's Word. Yet some are, so it's worth considering whether a current hardship you're facing is a wake-up call from God, sounding the alarm that comes from disregarding his word. If you're experiencing a problem like this, then you need the solution that follows.

### **The Solution: Heed the Word of the Lord (7:1-2)**

The problem was that Israel had disregarded the word of the Lord. Now here's the solution. In 7:1, Elisha said, "Hear the word of the Lord," and by that he meant not merely to *hear* it, but also to *heed* it, i.e. to live accordingly. Heeding God's word is the way out of this and every pickle.

Heeding God's word is fundamental to the Christian life. To be a Christian is to be a member of the SWL: the Society of the Word of the Lord, i.e. the worldwide family of those who build their houses on the rock of God's word rather than on the shifting sands.

In 7:1-2, Elisha the prophet, God's ambassador to the king, gave the king this message: "The LORD says that tomorrow the food supply will exceed the demand, and therefore food prices will plummet in Samaria." However, the king's right hand man would not believe the word of the Lord, so Elisha warned him of the consequences of his disbelief. One way or another, we all will learn to trust in the word of the Lord. We mustn't wait until it's too late. Sadly, the king's right hand man was resolute in his foolishness. As we shall see, he stood his ground in disbelieving the word of the Lord. Before this story is finished, he will have suffered the consequences.

There are two paths we can choose, vividly portrayed by the imagery of Psalm 1. One way is to go what we think is our own way, but which is in fact walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of scoffers. That's the way that leads to death. The other way is to delight in the word of the Lord, and to meditate on it day and night. That way leads to flourishing, like a great tree planted by the river. Choose wisely. Choose to trust in the word of the Lord.

### **The Rescue (7:3-16a)**

Most of the remainder of 2 Kings 7 describes how God kept his word and came to Israel's rescue once more. It happened in two phases: first with four lepers, and then for the entire city of Samaria. In vv 3-4, the four lepers came to their senses and decided that going over to the enemy camp would be their best chance for survival. When they did (7:5), however, they found the enemy camp deserted. At this point in the Hebrew text there's a play on words: the Arameans had fled in fear of what they believed was a surprise attack by the *Mitsrayim* (Egyptians) but instead was only the *Metsora'im* (lepers). The point of the Hebrew pun is to show how God often accomplishes the impossible with the most improbable characters, in this case routing the Arameans with four starving men who looked like the walking dead.

The lepers feasted (7:8) and plundered the camp of the Arameans, but it wasn't long before they felt convicted (7:9) and said, "We aren't doing right. This is a day of good news." So they repented and then resolved to share the gospel (good news) with everyone else by going to tell the king. When they did, however, the apostate king still would not believe. He thought it was a trap (7:12). Thankfully his servants had the good sense to at least consider whether the good news of the lepers might also be good news for them too. So the king consented to sending out a search party who eventually confirmed the Gospel of the Lepers. By the next morning, the whole city had gone out to feast and gather the spoils of yet another victory that had been won by the Lord.

### **The Moral of the Story: Trust in the Word of the Lord (7:16b-20)**

The problem was that Israel had disregarded the Word of the Lord. The solution was to heed the Word of the Lord. The Lord rescued his people, as we have just seen. Now we come to the moral of the story. If it weren't for the last four and a half verses in 2 Kings 7, this would be just another story of God's deliverance in the face of impossible odds. However, starting in the middle of v16 and continuing to v20, there's a message that the narrator hammers home: to trust in the Word of the Lord. It's clear that we are meant to read this history lesson like a fable, with this "moral of the story" tagged on at the end. Consider the repeated refrain of God's trustworthiness in these remaining verses.

*[16b] So a seah of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, **according to the word of the LORD.** [17] Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. And the people trampled him in the gate, so that he died, **as the man of God had said** when the king came down to him. [18] For **when the man of God had said** to the king, "Two seahs of barley shall be sold for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria," [19] the captain had answered the man of God, "If the LORD himself should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?" And he had said, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it." [20] **And so it happened to him,** for the people trampled him in the gate and he died.*

In the Bible, redundancy like this should startle us. The biblical authors didn't have the luxury of unlimited paper. They had to be economical with their words. When we see an idea repeated four times in as many sentences, it ought to grab our attention. In short, what occurred in 2 Kings 7 happened **according to the word of the Lord, just as the man of God had said, for when the man of God said it, well then, so it happened.** The point here is not to further trample the king's right hand man, but to drive home the moral of the story, which is to **trust in the word of the Lord.**

All week long the world tells us that what really matters. What will really last forever, according to the secular world, is the name that I make for myself, and the degrees that I earn, and the followers I get, and the deals I make, and the experiences I accumulate.

Then every Sunday we gather together to remember that “the grass withers, and the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” In our Sunday liturgy we keep repeating what is most important, reminding one another in various ways of God’s promises to us. Before we share in holy communion together, we proclaim the mystery of faith: “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.” It’s like a reboot of our operating system, clearing out all the fragmentary data and wasteful processes that we accumulated during our sojourn among the narcissists. We are rebooted as those who trust in the word of the Lord. Then after feasting with the Lord, we go back out into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit, and trusting the Lord to keep his promises to us.

When I was in college, a NASA engineer wrote a silly book called *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988*. The author took many verses out of context, stringing them together to guarantee Jesus’ return and the end of the world in mid-September, 1988. In the town where I lived, a great many of the Christians were fooled by the book, such that when the day passed and the world didn’t end, they began to doubt the word of the Lord. That experience opened my eyes to see how easily people can be misled, thinking that they are trusting in God’s word, when they are in fact trusting in man’s twisted misinterpretation. I fear that we now live in a country filled with people who used to trust in the word of the Lord, but have wearied of it because of a parade of false teachers. The reason our congregation spends so much time and energy working through books of the Bible like we do is because we want to be part of a restoration of trust in the word of the Lord.

In Psalm 40, King David says that he trusted in the word of the Lord. When he waited patiently for the Lord, God inclined and heard his cry. God lifted him up out of the pit, set his feet upon the rock, and made his footsteps firm. As a result, King David sang a new song.

Don’t be like the foolish king who disregarded God’s promises, only to see his people literally cannibalizing their future. Don’t follow his path down with the scoffers who blame the Lord for the tragedies of their own making. Rather, follow in David’s firm footsteps. Trust in the word of the Lord, and wait patiently for him. He will set your feet upon the rock and you will sing a new song.