

Explore the Bible: Provision in the Extreme

July 18, 2022

- *The Explore the Bible Lesson for July 31 focuses on 2 Kings 7:1-15.*

My parents have told me stories of their experiences growing up among lower economic families in the barrio of West Dallas. To “make ends meet,” migrant summer jobs were always an option. However, these jobs proved to be extreme experiences. Their work was extremely tough, as they picked cotton or pulled sugar beets from the ground. The hours were extremely long, as they worked from sun up to sun down. And sometimes, the pay was extremely minimal, as some farmers tried to take advantage of these hard-working ethnic minorities.

Extremity in one’s life can come in different ways. Some people live in extreme poverty, and danger due to war-torn conditions, like the people in Ukraine and Syria have lived. Others live in severe debt or extreme wealth. Living in the extreme, good or bad, definitely brings challenges.

This week’s Scripture focuses on an extremely desperate time in Israel. A famine in the land has caused severe starvation due to the Aramean’s chokehold on resources. Families in Samaria are facing extreme difficulties finding food. Scripture illustrates how extremely terrible the food situation got with a sad account of two desperate mothers who cannibalize a child (2 Kings 26-31). Hope is bleak and extreme desperation has set in for Samaria. How would the Lord provide in such an extremely hopeless situation?

Maybe we have asked the Lord a similar question. We were probably not in a famine, but our situation seemed just as hopeless. We asked the Lord how

he would come through for us, how was he going to step into the extreme and provide a way?

Extreme Doubt (2 Kings 7:1-2)

The prophet Elisha brings an encouraging word of the Lord about a mighty deliverance in the middle of this severe calamity. It is no wonder the king's right-hand man doubted the Lord would provide abundantly amidst the scarcity. Probably, the precision with which Elisha shared the word of the Lord, by giving the time and place, seemed possibly too good to be true. And yet, the accuracy of the word of the Lord was meant to provide the people of Samaria with faith and hope in God's provision. The king's captain, instead, only gave doubt through sarcasm. Even if God could open windows in heaven, the provision still would not be enough, he said.

It is interesting how quickly words spoken in doubting sarcasm can negatively impact morale when dealing with God's plan and provision. What do we say in moments when faith is required? Are the words we speak motivating faith in others or taking it away? Elisha shuts down the doubting words and pronounces harsh consequences for them.

Extreme Desperation (2 Kings 7:3-8)

God uses four lepers who reason together about their current situation. They could starve outside the city gate or surrender to the enemy, hoping for leniency in sparing their lives. The lepers realize they have nothing to lose in such a bleak reality. At twilight, the courageous lepers head towards the Aramean camp and find no one. The lepers did not know God had taken care of the enemy by creating a sound that a vast army was attacking them. Fearful, the enemy fled quickly, leaving their food, resources, and other valuables. At first, the lepers only think of themselves enjoying the spoils of war. Then, they realize the significant provision these resources could be

for Samaria.

Extreme Deliverance (2 Kings 2:9-15)

Late at night, the lepers quickly leave the camp and head towards the city gate to inform the gatekeeper about their incredible find. The gatekeeper relays the message to the king. The king is awoken to the great news about the empty enemy camp but responds with hesitancy thinking the enemy is setting a trap. Again, the information seems too good to be true. And like Naaman's story, a servant speaks reason to this doubtful king and devises a plan to at least check out the truth of the lepers' message.

Like the lepers, Israel had nothing else to lose in such a hopeless situation. So, the king granted five messengers to scout the camp and see if what the lepers witnessed was true. As the messengers followed the enemy's escape route, the evidence of a fleeing army in haste was in clear view. The message was true! The enemy camp was empty with all its provision and wealth. The jubilant Israelites ran toward the provisions that Elisha said God would provide (7:16-17). In the middle of attempting to control the crowds, the king's captain, who had been skeptical of God's provision, saw the miracle God provided yet, was trampled to death and, just as Elisha said, would not partake of it (7:18-20).

Let's live in the hopeful assurance that God will always provide for our needs; even when things seem extreme, God is extremely faithful.

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