

## II Kings 6v24 to 7 v20 Is anything too hard for God?

### Introduction

Chris and Louise Booth appeared on the surface to have a good set of circumstances with a nice home steady work for Chris and two young children Billy and Pippa. However, more than a couple of years ago before Billy was two they recognised something was not right with their son. He was easily overwhelmed with the slightest deviation to his daily schedule and tears with accompanying tantrums were as familiar as night following day. It was soon diagnosed that Billy was autistic. It became an increasing struggle for his parents to help their son as there was no easy resolution to Billy's problems. However a visit to a Cat Protection shelter twelve months ago transformed their lives. It had been a general visit to look at the animals there with no commitment to any particular animal. On the day Billy chose to sit down on the floor in a room where there were a number of cats. One cat Fraser, who had experienced a very difficult life prior to his rescue and had, therefore, good reason to be wary of humans, nevertheless walked over with confidence and promptly stretched out across Billy's lap purring. The little boy looked up to his parents and simply said: 'Fraser is our cat he can come live with us'. In the last twelve months the cat has barely let four-year-old Billy go out of his sight and whenever he is developing a tantrum comes over and cuddles up to him which has an amazing soothing effect. Happiness and calm have returned to the household to a degree unexpected, prior to Fraser the cat's arrival [*Daily Mail* 16 June 2012]. There are a number of times in each of our lives when we face some very difficult problems or pressures that have no simple resolution. We pray earnestly and persistently but they do not go away and we wonder what God could be saying to us through or in spite of the circumstances He has allowed to cross our pathway. On occasions there are miraculous healings or other extraordinary answers to our prayers. However, in the vast majority of situations God provides the grace to live with and overcome the trials we continue to experience in daily life. In the ideal world we would like heaven on earth now, but this is not the world we live in. The apostle Paul learned after a serious struggle to accept this revelation from God, recorded in II Corinthians 12:9: *My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness*. There are occasions where it may be that God plans to grant our request but not yet and we need to rest in the Lord trusting that His timing will be revealed in due course. Our Bible verse for the year Exodus 33:14 says: *My presence will go with you and I will give you rest* –in other words trust Me with your future steps. The years have passed as we have prayed and made plans and engaged in all kinds of practical endeavours to erect fit for purpose premises for the work to which He has called us. In His time this work will be accomplished because nothing is too hard for God.

### 1. The unbelief of the king (II Kings 6:24-33)

<sup>24</sup> Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilised his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. <sup>25</sup> There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels. <sup>26</sup> As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, 'Help me, my lord the king!' <sup>27</sup> The king replied, 'If the Lord does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?' <sup>28</sup> Then he asked her, 'What's the matter?' She answered, 'This woman said to me, "Give up your son so that we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son." <sup>29</sup> So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, "Give up your son so that we may eat him," but she had hidden him.' <sup>30</sup> When the king heard the woman's words, he tore his robes. As he went along the wall, the people looked, and they saw that, under his robes, he had sackcloth on his body. <sup>31</sup> He said, 'May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!' <sup>32</sup> Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. The king sent a messenger ahead, but before he arrived, Elisha said to the elders, 'Don't you see how this murderer is sending someone to cut off my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold it shut against him. Is not the sound of his master's footsteps behind him?' <sup>33</sup> While he was still talking to them, the messenger came down to him. The king said, 'This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?' This situation has become critical. The large Syrian army

of occupation has devastated the land around Israel's capital city stripping it of its resources of food and other useful materials. However they don't have the tools to overcome the defensive fortifications of the city of Samaria. This city was built on a hill, though lacking natural defences like Jerusalem, forty miles south of this city, or Tyre in nearby Lebanon, it was still an impressive site and with strong defensive walls made it almost impregnable [G. Turner, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 212]. Food prices are astronomical. A shekel was the monthly wage of the average working man at that time. This puts the prices into perspective. This is not an unusual occurrence. In Richmond, Virginia, during the American civil war the following prices were advertised in March 1865: 'Bacon \$20 a pound [£192]; live hens \$50 [£481] each; beef \$15 [£144] a pound; butter \$20 a pound.' [B. Davis, *To Appomattox*, p. 9]. However, this is not the best joints of beef or dining like kings in a Five Star hotel an absolute fortune is being paid for a donkey's head or a small portion of some unappetising seed pods, popularly described as 'dove's dung'! These prices mean that only the richest citizens can afford to purchase such 'food'. Ordinary people have nothing left to eat. This siege, therefore, has been going on for months and life is totally grim. Here in this city believers and unbelievers alike experience the same conditions, but their reactions are very different. The scenario of the two women and their children is a desperate one; words fail to convey the utter horror that would drive anyone to behave in this way. This tragedy causes the king to lose the place completely. His nominal belief in God and respect for Elisha, that was well grounded (see II Kings 6:8-23) in some extraordinary answers to (other people's) prayer, vanished. He came to the point of rejecting God completely and blaming Him for the plight of his people. He probably felt just as keenly his own utter helplessness to do anything to assist his people. There are men and women I have met, and probably you also, who have made such a choice after some tragedy in their lives, possibly a bereavement or a divorce or some other major loss. It was barely twenty-four hours before these people would see the extraordinary power of God at work in their midst, but this man and probably others also in the city gave up any hope of a divine intervention in their lives. Where do you and I as Christians stand today? We can grow weary in God's work. Yet at such times there are promises to claim, such as Galatians 6:9 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* Or the apostle's reminder to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 15:58: *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.* God's timescale is often much longer than we would prefer – but He will always keep His promises.

Are you here as someone who has yet to put your faith and trust in Jesus? We serve a God who can be trusted through the hard times as well as when it is 'plain sailing'. I want to encourage you to trust the Lord. This does not mean we can always see where He is leading us or know why obstacles are allowed to cross our pathway. The words of the king at the end of II King 6 (verse 33) are profoundly sad: *The king said, 'This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?' The reason is quite simple and stated in the exhortation in Proverbs 3:5-6: 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; <sup>6</sup>in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.* This is a promise well worth heeding and living by.

## 2. **The scepticism of the official** (II Kings 7:2)

<sup>7</sup> *Elisha replied, 'Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: about this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.'* <sup>2</sup> *The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, 'Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?'* The vast majority of people in secular Britain today are not atheists; only a handful of people subscribe consistently to

that philosophy, but a much greater number sit on the fence and profess some form of agnosticism –if pushed to identify their allegiance. This in reality means very little difference to the former category in terms of decision-making in everyday life means very little difference to the former category in terms of decision-making in everyday life. This senior military official was a tough individual with a deeply sceptical view of life. He had probably attended many a civic service in his time, but had not only no personal faith in God, but also no desire to trust Him either. These words he uttered could so easily have been stated in our own generation by the many who would have echoed his sentiments. What we need to note here is not just his rejection of the man of God Elisha, but his direct challenge to the God of Elisha. When a follower of the Lord speaks God’s words accurately and they are dismissed, it is a direct challenge to the Lord Himself. Likewise when our brothers and sisters in Christ in their thousands are discriminated against in a wide variety of ways or imprisoned, tortured and killed each year then it is not primarily them but the Lord Himself who is being attacked. Remember Jesus’ words to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:3-6: *As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ <sup>5</sup>‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ He replied.*

In the light of such a contemporary mindset how do we as Christians communicate something of our faith in a way that people grasp the reality of its relevance and applicability to daily life? In essence it is quite simple –are we walking the walk of faith in our congregations or just talking the talk? If the latter then it is irrelevant to the outsider and only confirms their view that churches are religious clubs, an alternative to the Rotary Club or the Bowling Club or some other equivalent institution for people of a similar mind. However, when they come into our midst and see real community in action and sense the presence of God they can catch a glimpse of something that hopefully they will want to experience more fully for themselves over time. The challenge for Christians is how we can build natural bridges to connect with the people who don’t have everything in place; with the people who are looking for a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Activities for parents and toddlers; older people’s clubs, cafes and many more options are gateways into our communities in which we need to invest, that over the medium to longer term will result in lives transformed by the good news of the Gospel. More people are searching that we ever realise but they are also very wary of commitment to anything unfamiliar and will take as long as they need to find out in formation before they would consider a step as big as joining a local church. In the last twenty years informal evangelistic outreaches such as *Alpha* and *Christianity Explored* have been a useful tool that has resulted in people coming to faith in Jesus, but what matters most to people who have yet to come to faith is that they see something of Jesus in you and me.

### 3. **The faith of the prophet** (II Kings 6:32 & 7:1-2)

(a) **The place of the prophet and the elders** (II Kings 6:32) <sup>32</sup> *Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. The king sent a messenger ahead, but before he arrived, Elisha said to the elders, ‘Don’t you see how this murderer is sending someone to cut off my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold it shut against him. Is not the sound of his master’s footsteps behind him?’...* Notice the leaders of the nation and that city were not with the king they were with the man of God in his house. The symbolism of this action must not be missed here. These men trusted the word of the prophet more than the king who was in charge in secular terms. Yet human rulers, whether Presidents or Prime Ministers, have only a limited say over the affairs of human beings; there is a place for politics and we value the ones that truly serve their communities and their nations. However, what they can deliver may fall significantly short of the rhetoric displayed at election times. Where are you placing

your trust today? Where do the people around you place their trust? Proverbs 1:33 states: *but whoever listens to Me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.* Is the most influential voice in your life the one from the Lord? Many of us at times struggle over hearing what God is saying to us about particular situations in our lives. Other Christians sometimes cover up their personal insecurities by claiming that God has directed them to speak or act in a particular way when that clearly has not been the case. We all need humility in the presence of God and when seeking to represent what He may be saying to us. In Psalm 31:14-15a David makes the following statement: *But I trust in you, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'*<sup>15</sup> *My times are in your hands;* our future both individually and together is in His hands. Can you say that? Can we say that with respect to the potential development project we are exploring just now? When like these leaders of God's people we can put the timescales in His hands it takes some of the pressure off us –not to procrastinate! But instead to seek His way in His timescale which is always the better plan. The king was desperate to find a solution to his problem, but what he was proposing –the execution of Elisha– would not have helped anyone. God's people need to be in God's presence seeking His will and trusting Him for their future. In Philippians 4:19 the apostle Paul, from prison declares: *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.* That day in 1999 Dominggus Kenjam, an Indonesian Christian, will never forget. He was woken up early in the morning hearing a Muslim mob shouting 'Allah-u-Akhar' (God is great); he was grabbed out of his bed and blows rained down upon him from a number of assailants. A voice shouted out: 'kill the men and spare the women'. He was already fading from consciousness when he saw a man produce a sickle and start raining blows down upon his neck. The trickle of blood became a steady one and he was convinced his time on earth was drawing to a close. At that very moment, he reported, instead of fading into total unconsciousness he felt his spirit leaving his body and being escorted away by two angels. As he ascended he looked down to see his body huddled on the floor, convinced he had died. The feelings of fear and pain vanished as an indescribable peace flooded his being: 'I am going to be with Jesus', he thought. Just at that very moment he heard a clear voice say: 'it is not time for you to serve me here.' Then he felt that he was slowly floating back to his body on the floor in his home. He regained consciousness listening to two paramedics wondering which funeral parlour to take his body to –a Christian one or a Muslim one. 'I am a Christian' he said weakly, shocking the two men that the supposed corpse had spoken [*Jesus Freaks*, Vol.2, pp. 74-75] However, it is not just in Muslim Indonesia where this is true. In an increasingly sceptical UK the same truth is applicable –our times are in His hands.

(b) **The proclamation of the prophet** (II Kings 7:1-2) *Elisha replied, 'Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: about this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.'* <sup>2</sup>*The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, 'Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?' 'You will see it with your own eyes,' answered Elisha, 'but you will not eat any of it!'* it was to this prophetic word that the royal official had been so sceptical. Now it is important to note that this message was specific detailed and could be proven demonstrably to be false or true within a specific timescale. It was also completely based on information communicated by God to Elisha, not on any reasonable prediction of future events in the city. Elisha's credibility is on the line. Now the prices given here are not like Christmas sale prices provoking long queues to gather hours before the shops open. The cost of the flour was still approximately the equivalent of the average monthly wage. The cost of the barley will still be six times higher than the listed price in neighbouring Babylon, for example. So although there would be good quality food on offer in the marketplace instead of what had been the fare for the few who could afford to buy it at outrageous black market prices [D.R. Davies, *II Kings The Power and the Fury*, p. 121.] What is most sobering is what is said to the sceptical official. You

will see that this is coming to pass, but you will not benefit from it because you doubted the power of God and His goodness to His people. This is not about having a big faith or a little faith in God; on the contrary it is trusting our great God to take care of our future. The difference between these two positions is vast. Have you committed your life to Jesus? if you have never done so then please do so today –it is the most important step you can take.

#### 4. **The conscience of the lepers** (II Kings 7:3-10)

<sup>3</sup> Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, 'Why stay here until we die?' <sup>4</sup> If we say, "We'll go into the city"— the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die.'<sup>5</sup> At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, no one was there, <sup>6</sup> for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, 'Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!' <sup>7</sup> So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives.<sup>8</sup> The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp, entered one of the tents and ate and drank. Then they took silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.<sup>9</sup> Then they said to each other, 'What we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace.'<sup>10</sup> So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, 'We went into the Aramean camp and no one was there – not a sound of anyone – only tethered horses and donkeys, and the tents left just as they were.' The lepers knew what to do but probably had struggled with doing it for some time. At last the day came –this very day of Elisha's message from God, when they stepped out in faith and would be blessed for taking this step. When prompts you to say a word for Him or send some form of communication or perform an act of kindness for someone. Don't hesitate to do what He asks you to do, because He may have a bigger purpose behind it than you realise. Steps of faith can be nerve racking at the time, but the blessing that flows from obedience is more than a reward, it brings delight to our Father's heart. Then their consciences bothered them because they had kept God's good news to themselves. Have you been too shy with the Gospel lately? Or are you available to God to pass on the greatest news of all should the opportunity arise? Praise God they didn't keep it to themselves or a city full of people might have perished physically. Men and women in our land are facing eternal peril if they leave this life without Christ? Will you pray for opportunities to speak to your work colleagues / family members or maybe even a total stranger God places across your pathway? Praying for those God moments where He is already working is so exciting when they come to pass. The question is this: would you or I see more special God-moments if we were more sensitive to His voice? This is very possible.

#### 5. **The goodness of God** (II Kings 7:11-20)

<sup>11</sup> The gatekeepers shouted the news, and it was reported within the palace.<sup>12</sup> The king got up in the night and said to his officers, 'I will tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know we are starving; so they have left the camp to hide in the countryside, thinking, "They will surely come out, and then we will take them alive and get into the city."<sup>13</sup> **One of his officers answered, 'Make some men take five of the horses that are left in the city. Their plight will be like that of all the Israelites left here – yes, they will only be like all these Israelites who are doomed. So let us send them to find out what happened.'**<sup>14</sup> So they selected two chariots with their horses, and the king sent them after the Aramean army. He commanded the drivers, 'Go and find out what has happened.'<sup>15</sup> They followed them as far as the Jordan, and they found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in their headlong flight. So the messengers returned and reported to the

king. <sup>16</sup> Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of the finest flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the Lord had said. <sup>17</sup> Now the king had put the officer on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate, and the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died, just as the man of God had foretold when the king came down to his house. <sup>18</sup> It happened as the man of God had said to the king: 'About this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.' <sup>19</sup> The officer had said to the man of God, 'Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?' The man of God had replied, 'You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it!' <sup>20</sup> And that is exactly what happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died. Praise God for the officer who urged exploration of the message delivered from God. If the king had got his way then there would have been no testing of the Word of God in practice. The king was convinced there had to be a catch. It must be an ambush. Well, that was possible then and now in a time of war. But had not prayer been offered to God about this situation? Yes lots of it, I am sure! Now He had answered their prayers. What does this incident teach us? The simple lesson is that God answers prayer. The second thing is that God answers prayers in a timescale often that we are not expecting –sometimes quicker than we expect and on other occasions taking much longer in days, weeks, months or even years than we had thought desirable. Thirdly, God answered their prayers for deliverance in a manner totally unexpected. What they had sought would happen but not in the way they had expected or planned for it to happen. In Isaiah 55:8-11 these powerful words are appropriate ones to conclude this message: 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord.<sup>9</sup> 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. <sup>10</sup> As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,<sup>11</sup> so is My word that goes out from My mouth: **it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it, Amen.**