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2 KINGS 6:1-7:20

Today's lesson continues to affirm God's hand upon His prophet, Elisha. We're going to see this take place in several different ways, the first being the miracle of the floating axe head. This is the seventh of a series of miracles Elisha performed by the power of God.

Let me just summarize this miracle for you. Apparently there was a school for the prophets...and apparently the place where these young prophets were living had become crowded. So, these young "preacher boys" decided to build what you and I would call "seminary housing."

So, they came to Elisha and asked him to go with them to get this project started. And as they began to cut down trees, the axe head of one of the prophets fell into the water and he cried out to Elisha and said, "Alas, my master! For it was borrowed."

And Elisha asked where it fell and when the young man showed him, Elisha cut off a stick, threw it in the water and made the iron float.

God is showing Himself strong and mighty on behalf of His children. We'll see as we go along in this book that He will show Himself mighty to the enemies of His children as well.

All the miracles in this book are to prove to the people that God works through His prophets to get the attention of His people...to get them to remember there is only one true and living God!

I also believe this particular miracle teaches you and me that nothing in our lives escapes God's attention. He is indeed interested in every aspect of our lives.

Verses 8-14...You know, many times we're tempted to believe the Bible is old and crusty and dusty. I mean, we tend to believe the Word of God is not relevant for today and it has lost touch with our modern day world.

But, don't the verses we just read sound like today's newspaper? I mean, if we had picked up this morning's paper and read that Syria was getting ready or had already come against Israel, we wouldn't be a bit surprised, would we?

There has been a hatred between the Syrians and the people of Israel for thousands of years...and even today in 2004, there still is.

The king of Syria was planning an attack against Israel and the Holy Spirit told Elisha about it and Elisha sent word to the king of Israel not to come to the place where the Syrians had planned their attack.

And the king of Syria was certain there was a spy in their midst and he called his people together and said, "Who among you is against **me** and **for** the king of Israel? Everywhere I send my troops, the king of Israel already knows about it. Surely there is a spy among us."

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And one of his servants said, "Oh, there's not a spy among us, O King. But, one thing you can be sure of...the prophet Elisha tells the king of Israel everything you say, even the things you say in your bedroom."

And the king of Syria said, "Well, we're going to have to put a stop to that. Where is this prophet?" And when he heard that Elisha was in Dothan, he sent **horses and chariots and a great army** there and they came by night and surrounded the city of Dothan.

Verses 15-17...

I think Christians need to remember every day that we live in a world where there are **two forces...one that is for us and one that is against us**. And in the world that is **for us** and the world that is **against us**, there are both **physical and spiritual personalities**.

In the world that is **against us** the physical personalities are folks who don't share the same faith we do, and who hate us because of it.

That's what we see here. The Syrians were heathens. They did not worship the God of Israel. They hated those who did. The Syrians were against the people of Israel. They did not worship the same God. They did not believe the same things. They did not share the same dreams.

And we see that being fleshed out in our world today, don't we? I mean, there are those who, for the very same reasons, are against Israel today. And there are those today who are also against the Christian for the very same reason.

And, in addition to **physical forces** against us, we also have **spiritual forces** against us. Paul tells us that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against **rulers and powers and world forces of darkness and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places**.

But, we also have physical **allies**. There is a world that is **against us**. But, there is also a world that is **for us**. God has given to us a family of God. He has given to us each other.

The pastor preached on the value of friends last Sunday night and I want to tell you...I'd hate to think of life without my brothers and sisters in Christ to help me and to admonish me and to encourage me and to lift me up in prayer.

Not only is there in this world that is for us those whom we can reach out and touch...but there are those all around us whom we cannot even see. And that's what I want us to think about this morning.

I believe many times the emphasis is on the demonic world. Books are written about the devil and his demons. Movies are made about this subject. Seminars are given on how we're to combat the devil and his demons.

And even though angels have been given a little more emphasis in recent days, still there is not nearly as much given to us about the angels of God as is given to us about the demons of Satan.

The Bible tells us that when Satan fell, he took one-third of God's angels with him. The good news about that is that he wasn't able to take the other two-thirds. **They stayed faithful to God. They serve God even today. They praise God in song and music. And they minister to God's children.**

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The book of **Hebrews** tells us they are ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation.

They minister to **you and me!** **We** are the ones who will inherit salvation! **We** are the heirs of salvation!

So, I want us to spend a little time this morning thinking about these spiritual beings whom we take so much for granted.

Let me just share with you a few stories.

Years and years ago, Dr. S. W. Mitchell, a famous Philadelphia neurologist had gone to bed after an exhausting day. As he was just falling asleep he was awakened by someone knocking on his door. When he opened the door, there stood a little girl who was very upset and poorly dressed.

She told him her mother was very sick and would he please come and help her. So, the tired doctor got up and went out into the cold and snowy night.

He followed the little girl and found her mother desperately ill with pneumonia. He arranged for her medical care, and then complimented the sick mother on the intelligence and persistence of her little daughter.

The woman looked at him strangely and said, "**My daughter died a month ago.**"

Was the doctor guided to the lady in her hour of desperate need by an angel who appeared as this woman's little daughter?

The Reverend John G. Paton, a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands, tells a story of the **protective care** of angels. One night John Paton and his wife looked out and they were surrounded by hostile natives. John Paton and his wife prayed all night, and when morning came, they looked out and were amazed to see the attackers had left.

Years later, the chief of that tribe was converted to the Lord Jesus Christ, and Mr. Paton asked him what had kept him and his men from burning down the house and killing him and his wife.

The chief was surprised that he would ask such a question. He said, "Who were all those men you had with you there?" The missionary said, "We had no one there...just my wife and myself."

The chief said, "No, there were many men standing guard, circling the mission station...hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords in their hands and we were afraid to attack...."

It was only then that Mr. Paton realized God had sent His angels to protect them...ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of believers.

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In April of 1918, before the Americans entered WWI, the town of Bethune, France was being overrun by the German forces. Nothing stood between the German Army and Paris except the little, defenseless town of Bethune.

British Captain Cecil Hayward gave his personal eyewitness account of what happened at Bethune. He said this was an anxious time for Great Britain. The British troops had been in the trenches fighting for weeks without rest or relief and they were exhausted.

Captain Hayward says that the enemy fire had been largely directed against the shattered town of Bethune, and suddenly it lifted, and for no military reason, the Germans turned their guns on bare ground. He said, *"This open ground was absolutely bare of trees, houses or human beings, yet the enemy gun fire broke on it with increasing fury."*

The British were confused and couldn't understand why these German soldiers were mounting such an attack with cannon and machine guns on nothing but bare and open ground. The Germans had been marching toward victory. They seemed unstoppable.

Their goal of reaching Paris seemed clearly in sight...

Until they noticed a cavalry which they assumed was British. They were wearing white uniforms and they were advancing on the bare ground on white horses

The Germans later said that all the machine gun and canon fire seemed to do no damage against this white cavalry.

One captured German officer later said, *"They kept advancing toward us...not a single man or horse fell."*

In front of this white cavalry rode their Leader. His hair was like spun gold and there was an aura around His head. On His side was a great sword but His hands lay quietly on the horse's reign.

In the midst of all our firing, the German said this white cavalry continued to advance. He said, *"Then a great fear fell on me. I, an officer of the Prussian guard, fled, panic-stricken and hundreds of men around me were whimpering like children. Their intense desire was to get away from the white cavalry and their awe-inspiring Leader."*

Then, he said, *"That is all I have to tell you. We are beaten. The German army is broken. There may be fighting, but we have lost the war. We are beaten, by the White Cavalry. I cannot understand."*

But you and I **can** understand this! Because the British nation had called her people to prayer and the President of the United States summoned the American people to do likewise...and united prayer went up from all English speaking peoples...and God answered these prayers.

Air Chief Marshall Lord Hugh Dowding of the Royal Air Force related this story of the Battle of Britain.

He said that the British pilots were exhausted and had lost a lot of aircraft. He told about airmen on a mission who, having been hit, were either incapacitated or dead.

Yet, their planes kept flying and fighting; in fact, on occasion

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pilots in other planes would see a figure still operating the controls.

What was the explanation? **The Air Chief Marshall said he believed angels had actually flown some of the planes whose pilots sat dead in their cockpits.**

Dr. Billy Graham tells of a time when he visited the American troops during the Korean War. He was told of a small group of American marines in the First Division who had been trapped up north. The temperature was twenty degrees below zero and they were close to freezing to death.

They had had nothing to eat for six days and surrender to the Chinese seemed their only hope of survival. But, one of the men was a Christian and he pointed out certain verses of Scripture, and taught his friends to sing a song of praise to God

Right after they had sung, they heard a crashing noise, and turned to see a wild boar rushing toward them. As they tried to scramble out of his way, **he suddenly stopped in his tracks**. One of the marines raised his rifle to shoot, but before he could fire, the boar toppled over. The men rushed up to kill him only to find **he was already dead**.

That night, they feasted on meat, and began to regain their strength.

The next morning, just as the sun was rising they heard another noise. They were afraid the Chinese had discovered them, but their fear suddenly vanished when they found themselves face to face with a South Korean who could speak English. He said, "I will show you out." And he led them through the forest and mountains to safety behind their own lines.

When they looked up to thank him, they found he had disappeared. **Could he have been an angel sent to minister to those who were on the side of right?**

Corrie ten Boom tells several angel stories in her books. One she tells was when she and Betsie were taken to the Nazi Ravensbruck prison camp for hiding Jews in their home. All the women were being searched. She had hidden her Bible under her dress.

Corrie prayed, "Lord, cause now Thine angels to surround me; and let them not be transparent today, for the guards must not see me."

She said that all the women were checked, from the front, the sides, the back. Not a bulge escaped the eyes of the guard. But Corrie said the guards let her pass, for they didn't see her.

Outside, they were all searched once again. Corrie said, "The guards felt the body of each one who passed.

I knew they would not see me, for the angels were still surrounding me. I was not even surprised when they passed me by; but within me rose the jubilant cry, 'O Lord, if Thou dost so answer prayer, I can face even Ravensbruck unafraid.'"

Another time, Corrie ten Boom prayed her "angel prayer" when she was smuggling Bibles into Russia. Again, God sent His angels to protect her. The Bibles were not discovered and she was able to carry them into the country without a problem.

I know most of us in this room could probably tell personal "angel stories" either from our own life or from the life of someone we know...but we simply don't have the time to do that.

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We could tell story after story after story of angels in Scripture.

We could tell of the angels that were placed to guard the entrance of the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been banished from it.

We could tell of the angel who protected Daniel in the den of lions.

We could tell of the angels who appeared to Abraham and Lot and Jacob.

We could tell of the angel Gabriel who came and announced to Zacharias that he and Elizabeth would have a son who would be the forerunner of the Savior.

And we could tell of the time Gabriel came to Mary and told her she would have a child who would save His people from their sins.

We could tell of the time Peter was in prison and an angel came and released him.

We could tell of the time the elderly apostle John was on the Isle of Patmos and the Lord Jesus communicated to him by an angel all that he wrote for us in the book of **Revelation**.

We could tell of the thousands upon thousands of angels that John saw around the throne of God singing praises to His name.

We could go on and on about angels. We haven't even begun to scratch the surface of the subject of angels.

But, what I want us to see today more than anything else is that God has "given His angels charge over us to bear us up lest we dash our foot against a stone."

I want us to know that those who are for us are better than those who are against us.

First of all, they are greater in number.

Verse 16... "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." We sometimes forget that the good angels outnumber the bad angels two to one.

Secondly, they are greater in authority.

When the servant's eyes were opened he saw that these angelic beings were on the mountain...and the mountain is always a place of authority in Scripture.

Thirdly, they are greater in power.

If this were not so, the demons that controlled the king of Syria would have come against the angels that were there to render service to Elisha and they would have been victorious.

The rest of this chapter tells us that the men of the army of Syria were allowed to go back home, unharmed by the angelic beings.

Well, before we leave the subject of angels, I want us to know that the Bible teaches us that we have an angel to look after us individually...maybe more than one...some of us, and surely some of our kids and grandkids need more than one, don't they?

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And I believe this should give us comfort. I truly believe if we could see the angelic world around us we would be absolutely amazed.

And I also believe the Bible teaches us that when we die, the angels of God usher us into the presence of God.

In fact, Bible indicates to us that believers will be not only escorted by angels into heaven but carried by angels into heaven...

Story after story has been told of folks seeing angels as they lay on their deathbed.

When Dr. R. G. Lee was on his deathbed, he seemed to have slipped out into eternity, and then he opened his eyes and said, "I've seen the angels coming for me. I've seen heaven. It's so beautiful, I never did it justice."

Much the same thing happened to D. L. Moody. After being given up for dead, he said, "Earth recedes, heaven opens before me. This is no dream...it is beautiful, it is like a trance. If this is death, it is sweet. There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go."

No doubt the folks around him and he himself remembered the time he had said, "*Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive that I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all – out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body...That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.*"

And as important as all these facts about the Northern Kingdom's sin and turning away from God is...let's not forget that the Holy Spirit has also slipped into His holy Scripture this passage that teaches us about angelic beings who surround believers and are sent to render service to those who are the heirs of salvation.

Let's just summarize what we see in **chapter 7**.

2 Kings 7 tells us a very sad story. It tells us of a very bleak time in the life of the land of Israel. King Benhadad had come against Israel and besieged it. To add to their misery, there was a great famine in the land. And people were even resorting to eating their own children.

Let me just say right here that God had told them this would happen. He told Moses way back in **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy** that there would come a time when the people of Israel would turn their back on Him and things would be so desperate because of this that they would resort to eating the offspring of their own bodies.

God takes very seriously the breaking of His covenants. God had made a covenant with the Jewish people. God had said, "*I will bring you into a land that I have already given to you. All I ask is that you remain faithful to Me and keep My commandments and be a light to the nations around you.*"

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But, they hadn't done this. And we're going to see in this book of **2 Kings** how God **will** bring judgment upon Israel and Judah. And He will do it in the form of allowing them to be taken from the land that God had given to them.

He didn't take the land away from them. He took them away from the land for a period of time. That land was given them in perpetuity. This was a forever covenant. But, there was something they were supposed to do that they didn't and that was they were to remain faithful to the God of Israel.

And we see this judgment of God beginning in this chapter...but it won't end here, it will continue all through this book. That's why we said the very first week we were in this book that **2 Kings** is indeed a very, very sad book.

Another interesting thing in this passage of Scripture is that Jehoram, the king of Israel blamed Elisha for the famine and the desperate situation in Israel. Why? Well, I don't know.

Maybe he really wanted to blame God and he was afraid to do that so he did the next best thing...he blamed the man of God. Maybe he just hated God's prophets like his mother and daddy, Ahab and Jezebel, did.

The rest of **chapter 7** tells us of four lepers who were so desperate for food that they decided to throw themselves on the mercy of the Syrians, but when they got to the Syrian camp they found it was deserted.

The Syrians had heard the sound of chariots and horses and they thought the king of Israel had hired other kings to come and help him defeat them. I wondered this week if what they heard was noise that God sent the angels to make!

Because, what they had heard was a supernatural sound from the God of Israel. And the bottom line of **chapter 7** is that God delivered His children from the hand of the enemy once again.

Not only were they delivered from the enemy, but they plundered the enemy's camp and got enough food to end their desperate situation.

God is patient. God is longsuffering. God's heart's desire was for His people to turn from their wicked ways and obey His commandments.

God sent His prophets. God sent His angels. God sent His Spirit to bring deliverance and conviction to His people. But, we're going to see that things went from bad to worse.

The good news about all this is the faithfulness of God to His children. I heard someone say this past week that the God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath...and He was. But, before His wrath was displayed against His people, His love was displayed, and His faithfulness and His longsuffering, and His patience, and His perseverance and His mercy...all these aspects of His character were displayed to His children!

The last thing God resorts to is wrath! He tries everything else first! And that should give us great comfort!

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Well, that's all we have time for today. I hope you and I will be aware this coming week of the fact that although we cannot see God's angels doing battle on our behalf and God's angels running interference for us and God's angels providing protection for us...they are there all the same.

Jesus told Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against His believers. One aspect of what the gates of hell represents is death...and I believe we've seen today that we don't have to fear death. We have angels to carry us from this life to the next.

We've also seen that God wants our eyes to be opened. Just as Elisha prayed that the eyes of his servant be opened, God wants our eyes open to the fact that He is constantly watching over and protecting and guiding us.

One last thing, just as God intervened in WWI and WWII and the Korean War, He still longs to intervene in the lives of His children. The question I believe is will His people pray. Will we ask for His mercy and forgiveness and deliverance?

Isaiah tells us that God's hand is not short that it cannot save, nor is His ear dull that it cannot hear. He longs to hear from His people.

Next week we'll see the death of a king and the death of a queen. And let me tell you ahead of time that we have three chapters in next week's lesson