

Ass's Heads and Dove's Dung

“And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.”

II Kings 6:25

Introduction:

1. There are more valuable lessons packed into this historical event than the title of the study might indicate.
2. Do you want your faith increased tonight by the word of God, which is why we have the Bible (Rom 10:17)?
3. Do you think you can play with God and get away with it? Let these extremities scare you (Pr 13:15; 29:1)!
4. Do you need a seemingly impossible reversal of fortune? Let this historical event give you hope (Rom 15:4)!
5. Do you doubt God's promises in the Bible? Let the punishment of a skeptic sober you (James 1:7; Rev 21:7)!

The Famine (6:24-29)

- A. Samaria was Israel's capital under Jehoram (1:17; 3:1); the Syrian armies had surrounded it (6:24).
- B. The siege by the Syrian armies caused a great famine in the city that reduced them to eating trash.
 1. A more expensive item at the grocery was an ass's head for 80 pieces of silver [\$307.00 USD].
 2. A less expensive item was 8/10 of a pint of dove's dung for 5 pieces of silver [\$19.18 USD].
 3. We are not forced to follow Bible skeptics, who want this to be merely a coarse and parched meal made from peas, called pigeon dung by the Arabians (compare II Sam 17:28).
 4. Severe famine has reduced people to eat the most unbelievable things, as in the context (6:29).
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 7. Doves typically eat the seeds of good grains, and therefore the dung might possibly be eaten.
- C. A woman calls on King Jehoram for help, not for locating food, but for finding her neighbor's son!
 1. Surely the king was hearing many cries for help, but this loud and plaintive cry got his attention.
 2. He responded with the typical sarcasm and helplessness of Ahab's grandson by Ahaziah (1:17).
 3. Observe the similarity of Jehoram to Ahab, and let every father consider what he is perpetuating.
 4. The king's granary and winepress were as empty as any others due to the siege by the Syrians.
 5. However, he gave her further attention for the obvious horror and pain in her cry for his help.
 6. She then described a deal with her neighbor to boil their sons and how the woman had filched!
 7. Such extremity was according to the promise of God (Deut 28:57) and occurred again in 70AD.
 8. The horror of this event is extreme; the humor is only by its circumstances and our great plenty.
- D. God can reduce you to extremities that you cannot even imagine, either internally or externally.
 1. Here we have ass's heads, dove's dung, and a boiled boy being eaten, even by its own mother.
 2. You would boil and eat your son, if God brought hard enough circumstances and removed grace.
 3. Lot staring out of the mouth of an empty cave with two pregnant daughters is a further picture.
 4. King Nebuchadnezzar is another classic example of how far a man can be reduced (Daniel 4).
 5. The way of transgressors is hard, and I exhort you to consider it well before it comes (Pr 13:15).

The Threat (6:30-33)

- A. King Jehoram, whom Jehu would kill later (9:24), swore in the name of Jehovah to kill Elisha (6:31).
- B. Like his grandfather Ahab, who murdered Naboth, Jehoram was a wicked king not fearing the Lord.
- C. Elisha revealed the attempted murder and told the elders to hold the messenger and wait for the king.
- D. Who sinfully said: “Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer.”
- E. Do not blame God for negative circumstances! Repent and seek His mercy for your sins (Pr 28:13)!
- F. Do not let impatience in a thing cause you to blame God for not delivering in your timing (Ps 123:2).

The Prophecy (7:1)

- A. Elisha prophesied that in 24 hours the complete reversal of fortune in Samaria would be complete.
- B. Ah reader, do you hear the word of the Lord? Do you know how many precious promises you have?
- C. God promises things in Scripture thought incredible to natural man, but nothing is too hard for Him.
- D. Fine flour, ready for baking, would be sold at the rate of \$3.84USD for 19.2 pints, or 1/3 of a bushel.
- E. Barley, in significant more supply, would be sold for \$3.84 USD for 39.4 pints, or 2/3 of a bushel.
- F. Fine flour would sell 120 times cheaper than the same amount of dove's dung at the present prices.
- G. Barley would sell 240 times cheaper than the same amount of dove's dung at the present prices.
- H. This is deflation by an enormous increase in supply of grain (in spite of increase in gold and silver)!
- I. No plowing, planting, growing season, sunshine, rain, reaping, harvesting, winnowing, etc., etc.!

The Unbelief (7:2)

- A. There was an unbeliever in the church, who sarcastically ridiculed the word of the Lord by Elisha.
- B. This man was at a high level of authority in the government of Israel, like Naaman in Syria (5:18).
- C. Elisha cursed this unbelieving skeptic with seeing the reversal of fortune but not participating in it.
- D. Do not ever doubt the ability of God to do anything (Genesis 18:14; Num 11:21-23; Jer 32:17,27).
- E. If you do not believe the faithfulness and promises of God, He will deny you the blessing (Jas 1:7).

The Lepers (7:3-11)

- A. Four lepers were in "no man's land," between the city wall and the Syrians, at the gate of Samaria.
- B. Consider these four men with flesh eaten away on the outside and dying of starvation on the inside.
- C. God can use any, no matter how lowly or impoverished, to accomplish His will and bring blessing.
- D. In their analysis of the situation and the three ways they could die, there was only one with any hope.
- E. Having chosen to chance it with the Syrians, they went toward their camp in the evening twilight.
- F. The LORD, with infinite ability beyond our imagination, had caused the Syrians to hear a huge host.
- G. Playing on their nerves in the falling darkness, they left anything they owned and fled for their lives.
- H. If you were frightened by noise of a coming army, would you run away forgetting your tied horse?
- I. The LORD can remove your enemies without allies or help in sight (Ps 50:15; Pr 16:7; Heb 13:6).
- J. The LORD can bring judgment so discriminately as to not touch any of His that are near (Ex 11:7).
- K. After eating and drinking and making two trips to bury treasure, they reflected on their great fortune.
- L. Their consciences smote them for enjoying such largesse and not sharing it with the rest of the city.
- A. When fortune is yours, it is your duty and privilege to consider others and share it (Acts 2:44-45).
- M. The text is not confused, as there were many guards or doorkeepers during war and with the king.
- N. For Bible skeptics, consider that archaeologists have fully confirmed a great empire of the Hittites.

The Reversal (7:12-16)

- A. The profane grandson of Ahab, though hearing Isaiah's prophecy, tried to explain away the Syrians.
- B. A wise servant suggested they use a few of the remaining horses to send scouts to find the Syrians.
- C. The double "behold," and the repetition of the extreme language, emphasized the great extremity to which the nation had been reduced and justified expenditure of a few worthless horses.
- D. The scouts pursued the Syrians 20 miles to Jordan, finding clothing and containers all the way there.
- E. The huge host of the Syrians was there for a long siege; so Israel found an extreme amount of spoil.
- F. Prices plunged! If a pint of dove's dung cost \$13.50, then what was wheat? But it dropped to \$.12!

The Judgment (7:17-20)

- A. King Jehoram appointed his skeptical and profane lord to be in charge of the city gate for the spoil.
- B. The Holy Spirit carefully repeated the details to show you how God killed this doubting unbeliever.
- C. Before he died by the crush of the starving city, he saw the incredible excess and knew the prices.

The Lessons

- A. God can reduce you to extremities that you cannot even imagine, either internally or externally.
 1. Here we have ass's heads, dove's dung, and a boiled boy being eaten, even by its own mother.
 2. Lot staring out of the mouth of an empty cave with two pregnant daughters is another picture.
 3. King Nebuchadnezzar is another classic example of how far a man can be reduced (Daniel 4).
 4. The way of transgressors is hard, and I exhort you to consider it well before it comes (Pr 13:15).
 5. You would eat your boiled son, if God brought severe enough circumstances and removed grace.
- B. Consider the similarity of Jehoram to Ahab, and let it remind every father of what he is perpetuating.
- C. Do not blame God for negative circumstances! Repent and seek His mercy for your sins (Pr 28:13)!
- D. Do not let impatience in a thing cause you to blame God for not delivering in your timing (Ps 123:2).
- E. God promises things in Scripture thought incredible to natural man, but nothing is too hard for Him.
- F. Do not ever doubt the ability of God to do anything (Genesis 18:14; Num 11:21-23; Jer 32:17,27).
- G. If you do not believe the faithfulness and promises of God, He will deny you the blessing (Jas 1:7).
- H. God can use any, no matter how lowly or impoverished, to accomplish His will and bring blessing.
- I. The LORD can remove your enemies without allies or help in sight (Ps 50:15; Pr 16:7; Heb 13:6).
- J. The LORD can bring judgment so discriminately as to not touch any of His that are near (Ex 11:7).
- K. When fortune is yours, it is your duty and privilege to consider others and share it (Acts 2:44-45).
- L. The judgment of God is certain against those who will not believe His precious word (Rev 21:8).
- M. Jehoram of Israel did not learn a lesson of fearing God by this event and was killed by Jehu (9:24).

Conclusion:

1. You have recently received daily devotionals dealing with prayer. Let this study build your faith in prayer.
2. Put your trust in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength (Isaiah 26:3-4).

For further study:

Evidence of a Hittite Empire: http://www.plvcc.org/archaeology_and_the_bible.htm

Evidence of a Hittite Empire: <http://www.christiananswers.net/AIIA/ap-vol6-no8.html>

Evidence of a Hittite Empire: <http://www.reference-guides.com/isbe/H/HITTITES/>

Evidence of a Hittite Empire: <http://debate.org.uk/topics/history/bib-qur/bibdoc.htm>

Davis Dictionary of the Bible (Fourth Revised Edition)

Cab	3.2 pints
Measure (Seah)	6 cabs
Shekel	224.6359 grains
Current silver price	\$8.20 per troy ounce (480 grains)
Ass's Head	\$307.00 USD
Dove's Dung (1 pint)	\$23.98 USD
Wheat (1 pint)	\$.20 USD
Barley (1 pint)	\$.10 USD