

# 2 KINGS 6

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## **6:1–3**

There is not a specific place near Jordan where Elisha and the sons of the prophets moved to. A couple of options near Jordan are Jericho, where Elisha stayed for a while after Elijah was taken to heaven, and Abel-meholah, where Elisha was from. It's interesting to consider that Elisha, who was a wealthy man with at least twelve plows living in Abel-meholah (see 1 Kings 19:19), now needed to borrow an axe. Elisha's plows would have mostly been made of wood—after all, Elisha burned the plows after his call to succeed Elijah—but the plows might have had iron at the tip.

## **6:4–5**

Israelite Iron Age axe heads are much like modern ones, and those who have used axes enough know they can fly off the handle if they become loose. That the axe in this story was borrowed shows the poverty of the sons of the prophets. But additionally, as we are told in 1 Samuel 13:19, the Philistines had restricted the people's access to smiths. Even though Elisha's time was a few generations separated from the time of the Philistines, iron tools might still have been fairly rare.

## **6:6–7**

This miracle is similar to some of Elisha's other miracles—for example, when he used salt to cure water and grain to cure poisoned food.

## **6:8–13**

It's possible that Naaman was no longer commander in chief of the Syrian armies. Perhaps the king no longer trusted him against Israelites after his conversion, or perhaps Naaman had retired. The Syrian king's first thought was that there was a traitor informing the king of Israel. The servant who informed

the king that Elisha “tellethe the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (verse 12) may have been one of the attendants who went with Naaman to visit Elisha in chapter 5.

Dothan is midway between the Jordan River and the coast of the Mediterranean. Either Elisha was traveling, or the group had moved again since verse 2. The story may also be placed out of order compared to the other stories. Most of these passages here and in the previous chapter are separate miracles that are more than likely out of chronological order since they don’t connect to each other and were possibly gathered much later. Dothan is mentioned in the Bible only in one other place—Genesis 37:17, as the location where Joseph was sold by his brothers.

### **6:14–18**

This is one of the most famous stories of Elisha. He asked the Lord to open the eyes of the young man with him and then prayed to blind the eyes of the army of Syria. Note the chariots and horses of fire are reminiscent of Elijah’s ascension.

### **6:19–23**

Rather than attack the Syrian troops with the chariots of fire, Elisha led the army to Samaria, the capital city of Israel and where the bulk of the Northern Kingdom’s army was located. King Jehoram, who in most other places disrespected Elisha, in this instance called him father.

### **6:24**

The previous verse, verse 23, says that “the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel,” and then this verse says that Ben-hadad laid a siege on Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The word “bands” might imply that only a raiding party came to kill Elisha, and after their experience no other small groups invaded. Thus when Ben-hadad decided to invade he did so with all his host.

### **6:25**

The idea expressed here is that the famine and siege combined to make everything in Samaria more expensive. Most scholars assume the donkey head would have been eaten and the dove dung (about 1.2 liters) would have been used for fuel. Compare the prices to Elisha’s prophecy of food prices in 2 Kings 7:1.

### **6:26–27**

The king’s helplessness is similar to his reaction to Naaman’s letter in 2 Kings 5:7. The word translated as “barnfloor” should be understood as a threshing floor, where wheat and other grains were beaten to separate them from the chaff. The threshing floor and the winepress are both locations of food production processes that were often compared to war. For example, Amos 1:3 compared the Syrians at war to threshing, and Revelations 14:20 shows the winepress as a symbol of blood in war.

### **6:28–30**

Compare this passage to King Solomon’s judgment on the two women who fought over the baby in 1 Kings 3:16–28. Jehoram didn’t have the same abilities and power as Solomon. That Jehoram was wearing sackcloth under his clothing is a great image and speaks well of his character. This is to show that he was in mourning but did not want to outwardly proclaim it.

### **6:31**

“God do so and more also to me” is a standard oath in various places in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> This placement does not refer to the story of the two women eating the child. Presumably, when an Israelite made this oath, it was accompanied by some sort of action. In the case of an oath given during a sacrifice, the action was probably to point to the slain animal. Some scholars theorize that without a sacrifice an Israelite could make the gesture of a finger dragged across the throat, an ancient hand gesture. For the Israelites, the gesture symbolized the sacrifice of an animal that was likewise cut at the throat.

### **6:32–33**

These verses are not very clear, and different translations interpret the events and speakers differently. Essentially the king of Israel (who was likely Jehoram, but we are not told) placed a price on the head of Elisha, and the king and his messenger went to Elisha, who must have been in the city as it was under siege and no one would have been able to leave. Elisha knew the king and his messenger were coming to kill him and gave instruction to block the door to one of them. It’s possible that “messenger” in verse 30 should say “king.” The words “king” and “messenger” are similar in Hebrew: “king” is *melek*, and “messenger” is “melak.” The question attributed to the messenger in verse 33 seems more likely to have come from the king.

Elisha called Jehoram “son of a murderer.” Jehoram’s father was Ahab, and his mother was Jezebel. The murder referred to was likely that of Naboth (1 Kings 21).

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Samuel 3:17; 14:44; 2 Samuel 19:3; 1 Kings 2:23.