

The Prophet Who Captured an Army

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Most of the Old Testament prophets come across as thundering voices of God rather than normal human beings... except for Elijah's replacement, Elisha. The little bald-headed man who inherited the mantle of Elijah gets angry when teased by a mob of boys (and sends two bears after his tormentors), feeds a widow and her son during a famine, and even makes an ax head float in the pond where it was lost.

But when an enemy of Israel decides to get rid of Elisha... well, they get more than they asked for.

The original story is recorded in 2 Kings 6:8-23.

The king of Aram declared war on the king of Israel;
it was a war he was sure he could win.
But every time he planned to attack an Israelite town
God would warn his prophet Elisha,
Elisha would warn the king of Israel,
the king of Israel would warn the town
and the town would be ready when the attack came.

The king of Aram was furious!
He called in his men and demanded,
"Which of you is the traitor?
Which of you warns the king of Israel about my plans
so he can have his army ready and waiting for me?
Admit your guilt and accept your punishment!"

"It isn't us!" his officers said.
"Israel's God tells His prophet Elisha all of your plans,
even the secrets you whisper in your bedroom!
Elisha is the one who warns the king of Israel—
he's the one who deserves your wrath!"

"Very well," said the king of Aram.
"Find this Elisha, this so-called prophet,
then take some troops and capture him.
I refuse to lose this war because of one man!"

So spies from Aram traveled the land of Israel
from one end to the other
and soon sent back a report: "Elisha is at Dothan."

And the king of Aram sent a large army
with many horses and chariots
to surround Dothan and capture Elisha.
This time the Aramean war machine would crush their enemies!

When Elisha's servant woke up that morning
and stepped outside his master's home,
he found the town surrounded and the townsfolk in a panic.
He ran back inside, shook Elisha from his peaceful sleep and cried out,
"We are doomed, master! Whatever shall we do now?"

Elisha simply smiled.
He patted his servant's shoulder and said, "Don't be afraid.
Our army is MUCH larger and stronger than theirs."
And then he prayed: "Oh Lord,
open my servant's eyes and let him see!"

The Lord did just that. And suddenly the servant saw,
all over the hills surrounding Dothan,
another army, a massive army covering the hills,
an army with horses and chariots of fire,
all standing ready to attack...

But they didn't need to.

As the Aramean army began to move on Dothan,
Elisha prayed once more:
"Oh Lord, strike them all blind!"
And suddenly the great Aramean war machine stopped,
unable to see anything. They were terrified!

And then they heard one man's voice—
it was Elisha, although they didn't know it.
His voice was calm and reassuring, and he told them,
"You're in the wrong place; the man you want isn't here!
But don't worry—just follow me and I'll take you to him."

So Elisha led them away from Dothan
to Samaria, where the Israelite army waited.
And when the Arameans were surrounded
Elisha prayed, "Lord, open their eyes!"

The king of Israel said to Elisha, "Thank you, my father!
Shall I kill them now?"

And Elisha said, "Of course not! We don't kill prisoners of war!
Let's just feed them and send them home to their king!"

So the king of Israel threw a big feast for their prisoners
and then they sent the Aramean army home
to explain this turn of events to their king.

The Arameans tried to avoid Israel after that—
more from embarrassment than fear, I suspect.
After all, how does a king explain to his subjects
that he sent his army to capture one little bald man...
and the little bald man captured his army instead?