

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
SIEGE AND FAMINE IN SAMARIA
2 KINGS 6:24-30

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I. WE SEE THE SIEGE AND FAMINE IN SAMARIA.

A. **The Reason For The Siege And *Famine*—Chastisement!**
In the Scripture before us, we see the city of Samaria in desperate straits! There is a great famine in the land because Syria was “*besieging*” the city!

Though verse 23 tells us that Syria was done sending *bands* of warriors into Samaria (*i.e. think guerilla warfare*), that didn’t mean that they were done with trying to defeat Samaria!

Understand however, that this **besieging and resulting *famine of food*** is because of the **great spiritual *famine*** that Samaria—both her king and her people—brought on themselves by their sin! (*i.e. This is an evil result of their having forsaken the LORD their God!*)

Remember how the LORD gave Israel and King Jehoram a **window of grace** from these attacking Syrian bands. The LORD, through the Prophet Elisha, struck the Syrian soldiers blind when they went looking to capture Elisha and do him harm?

Do we see any mention of any change in Jehoram or Israel when the LORD did that? No we don’t! **Was any glory given to the LORD by King Jehoram or by Israel? No it was not!**

B. **The Results Of The *Siege* And *Famine*—Starvation!**
As detrimental as a *famine* can be, we are going to see the **depths of suffering, despair, and even depravity** that it can bring out in lives of those who have cast off God in their lives!

So the LORD allowed Syria this avenue to chastise His people! Verse 24 says that Benhadad, the king of Syria, took all of his troops and went up to Samaria where he “*besieged*” Samaria. What does that word “*besieged*” mean? **It means they surrounded Samaria and didn’t let anything go in or out!**

Israel saw they were surrounded by the Syrian host. So they shut and locked the gates as a defensive maneuver against any attack by the Syrian host! That might seem like a smart move until you realize that the Syrians weren’t going to attack. **They were just going to sit and wait for what came next—the inevitable *famine* and accompanying *starvation* of people!**

Understand that “*besieging*” a city was a tactic that was frequently used in order to starve a city into weakness before attacking them. Or they would just starve the city *besieged* into just waving the white flag of surrender!

Now, just think for a moment about something like this happening to the city we live in. How long do you think it would it take for store shelves to be empty and people to get desperate for food? With stores not keeping great inventories these days, it wouldn’t take long! This pandemic has showed us that!

So the city of Samaria was shut up and their food supply dwindled because it was shut up. And so a *famine* eventually ensued because of the *siege*! In fact, the *famine* in the city got to where it was of such magnitude that we can see that their hunger caused some very unusual behavior. (Verse 25)

1. The head of an “*unclean*” beast, an *ass* (what we call a *donkey*), which would have had very little meat on it at all, and which was forbidden to be eaten under God’s law, sold for food for *eighty pieces of silver*. (That would be a little over \$500 compared to today’s money by comparison)
2. **The “*cab*” was the smallest Hebrew *dry measure*.** From what I could find it was a little over a quart. So a “*fourth part*”, would maybe be a little more than a half-pint, of the dried remains of “*dove’s dung*”.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
SIEGE AND FAMINE IN SAMARIA
2 KINGS 6:24-30

That sold for five pieces of silver (about \$32 in today's money)! Maybe it was used to make a stew of sorts or like grain to make bread—we are not told!

Now in looking to find some info about this, I found where some believe that “*dove's dung*” is just the name of some sort of plant in the region. But I also found that it could be what it sounds like because according to the historian Josephus, **both animal and human excrement have been eaten in sieges when a city was in very dire straits.** (*Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' 5:13. § 7; Cels., 'Hierobot.,' 2. p. 233*)

That's the depths of where sin can eventually take you!
But it gets worse:

3. **Things got so bad some resorted to *cannibalism*.**
Verse 26 shows Israel's king, Jehoram walking on the wall of the city, possibly surveying the struggles and the suffering of his people, but more likely he was inspecting his defenses, the troops on the wall.
Or maybe it was both—We are not told. But one day as he was doing this, a woman from below called out to him for help. Note the king's answer to her in **Verse 27**.

Now, the answer the king gave her here, **is the truth!**
But it does not appear to have been said in anything other than derision against the woman and against the LORD as well!

Listen, **if the LORD doesn't help us, how can anyone else help us? They can't!**

Now, if you aren't sufficiently grossed out already, let's consider the next verse—**Verses 28**.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
SIEGE AND FAMINE IN SAMARIA
2 KINGS 6:24-30

This woman who called up to the king for help revealed that she had made a bargain with her neighbor that they would boil and eat her son and then after they had consumed him, they would then do the same thing with the neighbor's son on another day.

Now I know that is hard to believe, but that's where the downward spiral of sin takes you—to the depths of depravity!

Verse 29

This woman also revealed that as the day drew near for her neighbor to bring her son to the cooking pot, the neighbor hid her child.

It appears that the neighbor's hunger had been appeased enough that she refused to bring her son. Or, maybe she was going to keep her son all to herself to eat.

Whatever the case, the child of the neighbor had been hidden his mother.

Isaiah 49:15—“*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.*”

Now, this story may seem to be too far-fetched to some to believe, but the fact is that it not only happened in Samaria, it also happened in Jerusalem when it was under siege.

Jeremiah the prophet, in the book of Lamentations (which was written AFTER the fall of Jerusalem) wrote about the time leading up to the fall of Jerusalem.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
SIEGE AND FAMINE IN SAMARIA
2 KINGS 6:24-30

Lamentations 4:9-10—“9 They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field. 10 The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.”

Now, we are shocked at this sort of thing taking place, but I have to bring this up that the not too distance past has also noted its own share of cannibalistic behavior.

II. WE SEE OTHERS WHO WERE DESPERATE IN FAMINE.

A. Consider The Donner Party.

The Donner Party (sometimes called the Donner–Reed Party) was a group of American pioneers who set out for California in a wagon train.

Delayed by a series of mishaps, they spent the winter of 1846–47 snowbound in the Sierra Nevada. Some of these folks resorted to cannibalism to survive, eating those who had succumbed to starvation and sickness.

The journey west usually took between four and six months, but the Donner Party was slowed by following a new route called the Hastings Cutoff, which crossed Utah's Wasatch Mountains and Great Salt Lake Desert.

The rugged terrain and difficulties later encountered while traveling along the Humboldt River, in present-day Nevada, resulted in the loss of many cattle and wagons and contributed to divisions within the group.

By the beginning of November 1846 the group had reached the Sierra Nevada where they became trapped by an early, heavy snowfall near Truckee (now Donner) Lake, high in the mountains.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
SIEGE AND FAMINE IN SAMARIA
2 KINGS 6:24-30

Their food supplies ran low, and in mid-December some of the group set out on foot to obtain help.

Rescuers from Sacramento, California, attempted to reach these folks, but the first relief party did not arrive until the middle of February 1847, almost four months after the wagon train became trapped. Only forty-eight of the eighty-seven members of the party survived to reach Sacramento.

Historians have described the episode as one of the most spectacular tragedies in Californian history and in the record of western migration.

B. Consider Andersonville Prison.

One of the survivors from Andersonville, the Confederate prison in Georgia, told a story of how hunger stripped all the starving soldiers of the principles of honor, chivalry, and humanity from them.

He told of how two men, who had once been close friends, lay side by side growing weaker as the days went by. Each was waiting for the other to die so that he could take his handful of beans and bread.

Finally one day in his impatience, he choked his friend to death—only to die himself just a few minutes later.

Those are some terrible, **desperate** outcomes of **famine/starvation**.

III. WE SEE KING JEHORAM'S RESPONSE TO THIS WOMAN'S STORY. (Verse 30)

After the king heard the story of this woman, he rent (or tore) his clothes. This is what people did during those days to express their deep-seated emotions of grief and pain.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
SIEGE AND FAMINE IN SAMARIA
2 KINGS 6:24-30

When the king ripped his garments, all of the people who were standing about him were shocked to see that there was *sackcloth* underneath his outer clothes.

Until that moment in time, they had only noticed his kingly attire. Underneath the fine, kingly clothes there was the horrible presence of those coarse brown rags made of *sackcloth*.

But understand that it is an oxymoron to wear *sackcloth* that is hidden! *Sackcloth* is a sign of **humility and repentance before God and man!** Hiding the sackcloth shows *PRIDE!* So, **this was a false humility and a false repentance!** At least up until this point!

He was NOT sorry for having forsaken the LORD! He was only sorry for the condition that he found himself and his people in!

A lot of people get **being sorry for their sin** mixed up with **being sorry because they are burdened by the consequences of their sin!** Those are two different things!

You might say, how do you know it was a false humility? Because he blamed the man of God (i.e. blamed God) in the very next verse!

And that will bring us to the rest of the story next week LORD willing!