

Place: Lurgan Baptist 28:10:2007

Reading: 2 Kings 8:7-15

## A HOLY MAN OF GOD

### 19. THE PROBLEM OF SIN

A special edition of Time Magazine entitled "*Beyond the Year 2000: What to expect in the Next Millennium,*" gives us a glimpse into the near future. As *Time's* editors and sociologists projected into the future, the view was not a pretty one. What will United States and the Western World look like in the years beyond 2000 ? What will our culture look like ? Where are we headed as a society ? What will be our lifestyle ? Well, here is the picture that is being painted.

#### 1. Multiple Marriages::

" *The family as we know it will soon die,*" they predicted. It will be nothing more than a mere blip in human history. Replacing it will be "*serial monogamy.*"

#### 2. Widespread Divorce:

" *Divorce will be so common as to be considered normal. Some marriage contracts will have sunset clauses, to automatically terminate at a given date.*"

#### 3. Women living Together:

" *Many women will live with other women.*"

#### 4. Multiple Parents:

" *Children will live with a bewildering array of relatives .... mothers, fathers, stepmothers, multiple stepfathers, stepbrothers, stepsisters, grandparents, former grand parents.*"

#### 5. Incest:

" *The taboo against incest will weaken.*"

#### 6. Childlessness:

" *The trend toward childlessness will accelerate.*"

#### 7. Child Abuse:

" *Children will be routinely victimized and will be bounced from home to home as families splinter and reform and splinter and reform. Many children will have no one to care for them.*"

#### 8. Sexual Explosion:

" *Paediatricians will teach children about sexual relations at the time of their vaccinations against disease.*"

#### 9. Atheism:

" *Theology, the study of God and the Bible will soon die.*"

## 10. Feminism:

“ *The triumph of feminist religion will cause many to shun references to God in personal masculine terms.*”  
We will not be able to use the term, “ **Heavenly Father.**”

## 11. Abortion:

“ *Forced abortion, such as China imposes on its women, will be necessary in nations with exploding populations.*”

It's not a pretty picture is it ? But if Christ does not come the second time this is the world in which we, our children, and our grandchildren will find ourselves. Why ? Why even at this present time is there so much crime and cruelty in our modern world ? ***Have you ever been perplexed about injustice, war, murder, rape, drugs and a host of other problems in our sick society ?*** Why in spite of increasing literacy, education and material benefits does the tide of wickedness and evil continue to rise ? The Bible teaches us that the answer lies in the depravity of the human heart. “ *The heart of the human problem is ever the problem of the human heart.*” The Bible says “ *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it ?*” ( Jer 17:9 ) Now in ( 2 Kings Ch 8 ) we are provided with a very clear illustration of *The Problem of Depravity.*

Elisha, in the course of his ministry travelled to

Damascus, the capital city of Syria. At this time, Ben-hadad, King of Syria was seriously ill. Elisha's arrival was promptly reported to the King, who immediately dispatched one of his couriers to inquire of the prophet regarding the possibility of recovery from his illness. At this point, the spotlight falls on Hazael, whose aspiration and ambition is unveiled by Elisha.

Now as we look at this passage we notice that 3 persons are doing something. Hazael, Elisha, and God.

### **(1) THE PURPOSE OF A DEVIOUS SERVANT**

Hazael is perhaps one of the most repulsive characters presented in Scripture. You see, when he undertook this mission for his King, he already had resolved upon his murder. At the same time, he took measures to deceive, and if possible to gain Elisha. What was this man's purpose ? What was his goal ? What was his aim and objective in life ? He simply wanted to be King. ( 8:11, 15 ) He aspired to be number 1 in Syria, he was a man hungry for more power. (1) Now notice that this:

#### ***(a) MAN'S PURPOSE WAS DISGUISED:***

Isn't the human heart skilled in disguise and deception ? My .... as we meet Hazael in this passage we never suspect him of having planned in his heart deeds of murder. *Indeed he is actually in the service of the man whom he intended to murder and whose throne he planned to usurp.* No doubt he was a trusted servant, no doubt he was someone to whom Ben-hadad looked for counsel and guidance. Yes, a cursory look at this

man would make you believe that he was generous ( 8:9 ) obedient ( 8:9 ) respectful ( 8:9 ) courteous ( 8:9 ) but the veneer of respectability covered a heart that was

**“desperately wicked.”** Have you ever walked across a field and turned up a flat stone ? Only to see a brood of hideous insects rushing in every direction to hide themselves from the light that poured in upon them. My ... if the shield of respectability was suddenly removed from us and we were left naked and open before the God with whom we have to do, would we be ashamed as believers ? For those secret sins of lust, of bitterness, of jealousy, of gossip, of falsehood, of pride, of unlawful ambition would be revealed ? My ... are we all that we profess to be ? Are we outwardly plausible but inwardly terrible ? Could it be that we are playing the part of the hypocrite as Hazael was ? Yes, (a) but this,

**(b) MAN’S PURPOSE WAS DISCLOSED:**

For as Hazael stood before Elisha, the prophet saw that Hazael was nothing less than a dirty bird of prey, a vulture perched menacingly on the crooked branch of his own filthy ambitions. For this man’s foremost desire and drive was to be ruler. Do you recall that it was Lucifer’s aim to be like the most High ? He said “ *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.* ” ( Is 14:13 ) You see, Hazael simply reflected the craving of his master, Satan. But Elisha saw him as he was cruel and callous, ambitious and arrogant. In vision he saw him reaching the throne of Syria, and leading the Syrian armies in cruel border raids on Israel.

( 10:32 Amos 1:3-5 ) Elisha saw the terrible atrocities for which Hazael would yet be responsible. I tell you this man’s purpose had been disguised from the king, but it was disclosed by the prophet. How many people there are like Hazael,

**(1) POLITICALLY:**

In our day and age we have seen what power hungry men have done to nations like Russia, Germany, Iran, Iraq and Uganda. Are there not many in the world of politics who as Dr Ted Rendall says “***are interested only in personal advancement and ambition.***”

**(2) INDIVIDUALLY:**

My ... we may be consciously impressing others with our gifts, abilities, and graces in order to gain applause and support. But the veneer of spirituality covers many a dark ambition, which, while kept secret is promoted slyly at every opportune moment.

**(3) ECCLESIASTICALLY:**

That is in church work. For “ *Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence,* ” is still found in many a church. ( 3 John 9 ) J. Vernon McGee writes, “ *There is generally one like him in every church, who wants to control the church and the preacher, this man tried to be the first pope. He was Diotrephes the Dictator.* ” Now listen there are only two places in the New Testament where the word “ *pre-eminence,* ” occurs. Do you know where the other one is ? Well, in ( Col

1:18 ) Paul says

“ *That in all things He might have the pre-eminence.*”

You see, it will always be either self or Christ ! My .... as far as I am concerned in this church there are no big shots or little shots, Christ ought to be number one. Now come back to our passage. We have here (1)

## (2) THE PORTRAIT OF A DEVOUT SAINT

Is it not interesting to observe that when Ben-Hadad wanted to know whether or not he would recover from his illness he did not send to the priests at the Temple of Rimmon where he regularly worshipped ( 5:18 ) At this critical time he didn't want **Religion** he wanted **Reality**. How sickness alters a man's thinking. It often causes the unsaved to stop their hostility toward the Lord and His servants. So the King who only recently sought Elisha's life ( 6:13 ) now seeks Elisha's help. ( 8:8 ) Did you notice how Elisha was referred to even in enemy territory ? “ *The man of God is come hither.*” Here's the first snapshot we have of Elisha in Damascus. He was,

### (a) **GODLY IN CHARACTER:**

Listen to the cry again that rang through the streets of Damascus and penetrated the halls of the palace, “ the man of God is come hither.” ( 8:7 ) Elisha, was now regarded even in Syria as “ *the man of God.*” In this psychedelic age, the term “ *man of God,*” indicates wild and weird and woolly freaks. But my .... in the Bible it meant a man who kept company with the Almighty. Do you recall what Elijah said to Ahab, “ *As*

*the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand.*”

( 1 Kings 17:1) When you're accustomed to standing before God kings don't matter much. Big potentates are just small potatoes when you have been standing in the presence of the Most High. My .... this is where Elisha stood. In the presence of God. “ The man of God is come hither.” ( 8:7 ) I wonder how are we known ? What do others in their daily business with us take note of ? How do they know you ? Do they know you as an angry man, a proud man, a clever man, a great business man, and a man who knows how to look after his own interests ? How will you be remembered in this generation and in the next, in this world and in the next ? What an epitaph for our tombstone, “ *the man of God,*” (a)

### (b) **BOLD IN SPEECH:**

Look if you will at what he says in ( 8:10 ) This was a strange statement but it was a true one. It seemed contradictory, but it was not. What Elisha said was that the disease would not kill Ben-hadad but something else would. The explanation was simple. The King would recover from certain death by “ *natural causes,*” only to die by “ *unnatural causes,*” namely by the murderous hands of Hazael, the king's successor. Looking into Hazael's eyes that day, Elisha not only saw his murderous intent towards his sick monarch, he also saw the hatred which the Syrian bore for Israel. ( 8:12 ) My .... Elisha was not in Damascus to heal a leper: to restore a dead child to life but rather to announce the death of a king. ( 8:10 ) What boldness

and fearlessness marked the man of God. Now did you notice that Elisha was bold, faithful, and fearless in spite of,

### 1. The Greatness of the Gift:

I mean forty camels laden with “ *every good thing of Damascus,*” would test any preacher. Ben-hadad would not be above trying to bribe Elisha to say good things. This was the character of the day and the character of heathen religion, the religion Ben-haddad was most acquainted with. Do you recall that when he sent Naaman to Israel for healing he sent him laden with gifts ? ( 5:5 ) You see, ***the Devil tries to ruin by the sword, but he also tries to ruin by the sugar.*** A large gift can often dictate the character of the message ( Deut 16:19 ) but Elisha was unmoved by the contribution. He spoke the truth regardless of the fawning favour of fickle men. His motives were pure. What about our motivation this .... ? Are you serving the Lord out of a pure heart ? 1.

### 2. The Negativeness of the Message:

For here he was in Damascus bringing a message of judgement. ( 8: 10-12 ) You see, the greatness of the gift not only tests the preacher, the negativeness of the message can test the preacher. *It's much easier to preach about heaven than about hell, its more palatable to people to preach about promises rather than precepts, about blessings rather than curses.* When I stand here and minister on comfort I am sure to draw a response, but when I minister on our

responsibility as the servants of the Lord that's different. But Elisha was not going to put velvet on his tongue and say nothing but nice things. He was bold in speech. Is this not what the early church prayed for ? “ *Lord behold their threatenings and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy Word.*” ( Acts 4:29 ) “ *And they spake the Word of God with boldness.*” ( Acts 4:33 ) **Boldness** is one of the great words of the New Testament. Indeed as used in the N.T. boldness contains *three shades of meaning.*

(1) ***It means COURAGE TO SPEAK:*** What is our biggest problem in witnessing to lost people ? Fear. But the Holy Spirit gives us courage to speak.

(2) ***It means CLARITY OF SPEECH:*** The ability to make clear and plain the message of Christ.

(3) ***It means CONFIDENCE IN WHAT WE SPEAK:*** This is the heart-assurance that what we say will be driven home by the Holy Spirit. My .... are you bold but not ignorant in your witness ? Are you praying that I might be bold in mine ? ( Eph 6:19) Elisha was (a) (b)

### (c) ***TENDER IN HEART:***

For we read in ( 8:11 ) “ *And the man of God wept.*” Why ? Well. Elisha was not only a prophet but also a patriot, he loved the nation of Israel in spite of their waywardness and now he saw the sickening atrocities Hazael would perpetrate indiscriminately on the inhabitants of Israel. ( 8:12 ) This man who began his

career as the patron saint of the euthanasia lobby, for in ( 8:15 ) he turned off the king's life-support system when there was every hope of survival, would later advance to abortion and killing of infants. Elisha saw this and wept. ( 9:14-15 10:32 12:17-18 13:3 22-24 ) And who would not weep if he saw these horrors come upon his country ? Sad to say, the horrors of Hazael have come upon our land. My .... our nation is reeling under the burden of drink, drugs, promiscuity, abortion and now they're talking about "**mercy killing.**" But where are "*the men of God,*" who nowadays weep for Ulster ? Where are the believers who are burdened about the spiritual and moral state of our land ? They're not even out at the place of prayer. "**And the man of God wept.**" ( 8:11 ) He wept because of the *Temporal Horrors* that were to come upon Israel, do you weep when you think of the *Eternal horrors* that will come on unsaved souls ? Will you put your son, daughter, parent over against this statement, "*And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.*"

( 2 Thes 1:9 ) As a lad of 17 years of age William Burns visited Glasgow for the first time with his mother. He was greatly moved because of the many sad faces he saw. In the crowds he got lost.

Eventually his mother found him, kneeling in an alleyway weeping bitterly. "*What ails you lad, are you ill ?*" "*Oh, mother, mother,*" he sobbed, "*the thud of those many Christless feet on the way to hell breaks my heart.*" My .... when did we last weep for souls ? When did we last sincerely weep for lost souls, lost sons, lost relatives, lost friends ? "*And the man of God wept.*"

The Purpose of a Devious Servant, the Portrait of a Devout Saint and finally,

### (3) THE PLAN OF A DIVINE SOVEREIGN

That's the final lesson we want to grasp from this passage. God is sovereign over the affairs of men. And God used Hazael to accomplish His purposes. Indeed he was raised up to inflict judgment on Israel for the idolatry of God's people. ( 3:3 ) Look if you will at, ( 1 Kings 19:15 ) This command was not fulfilled by Elijah but by Elisha and in the manner recorded for us in ( 2 Kings Ch 8 ) Are you not glad this .... that the Bible you hold in your hand is accurate, trustworthy, inspired by God. In the first book of Kings we have the prediction concerning Hazael, in the second book of Kings we have the fulfilment of the prediction. You see, Hazael's Accession to the throne, Syria's Attack on Israel, these were the results of Hazael's depravity, but behind it all God's plan was unfolding. For the,

#### (a) THE PEOPLE THAT GOD USES:

Are sometimes wicked, yet through them He accomplishes His purposes. Why did God choose to use Hazael ? To inflict judgment on Israel for their idolatry.

( 3:3 ) That's why we read, "*In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel.*" ( 10:32 ) My .... God knows what He is doing and He can even make the vessels of wrath serviceable for the fulfilment of His purposes.

*God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm*

*Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will*

This is,

**(b) THE PERSON THAT GOD IS:**

Sovereign over all the affairs of men. Do you recall Daniel's words ? “ *The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.* ” ( Dan 4:17 ) My .... God is in control **Nationally:** Do you know what Napoleon said on the morning of the Battle of Waterloo ? “ *We will put the infantry here, the cavalry there, the artillery here. At the end of the day England will be at the feet of France and Wellington will be prisoner of Napoleon.* ” The commanding officer said, “ **But we must not forget that man proposes but God disposes.** ” With arrogant pride the little dictator stretched his body to full height and replied, “ *I want to understand Sir, that Napoleon proposes and Napoleon disposes.* ” Do you know what happened ? God sent rain and hail so that the French troops could not manoeuvre as planned, and on the night of the Battle it was Napoleon who was prisoner of Wellington, and France was at the feet of England.

God is in control **Nationally.** Trust Him. But my .... God is in control **Personally.** “ *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.* ” ( Rom 8:28 ) My .... God is in control. Let's look to Him, depend on Him, trust in Him for “ *this God is our God for ever and ever He will be our guide even unto death.* ” ( Ps 48:14 )