

## 2 Kings 6 — They That Be With Us Are More — the Axe Head That Swam, the Mountain Full of Fire at Dothan, and the Siege That Devoured Samaria

*2 Kings 6: a borrowed axe head floats at Jordan; Elisha keeps reporting Syria's bedchamber plans to Israel's king until a great host surrounds Dothan by night, and the servant's opened eyes see the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire; the blinded Syrians are led into Samaria and sent home from a feast instead of a slaughter; afterward Ben-hadad besieges Samaria into cannibal famine and the king vows Elisha's head; Elisha's ministry under Jehoram of Israel, c. 846 BC (scriptural chronology; scholars place Jehoram's reign at roughly 852–841 BC).*

We are deep in the Elisha cycle now — after the Jordan parted with Elijah's mantle (ch. 2), after the widow's oil and the Shunammite's son (ch. 4), after Naaman came up out of the river with the flesh of a little child (ch. 5). Jehoram the son of Ahab sits on Israel's throne, and Syria under Ben-hadad probes the northern border in an ugly rhythm of raids and wars. Canonically we are around 846 BC (secular chronologies put Jehoram at roughly 852–841 BC). And this chapter, more than any other in the Old Testament, is about a single question asked at three different scales: *what do you see?*

### Hebrew Word Studies

***sha'al* (H7592) (שָׁאֵל) — to ask, inquire, request — and so, to borrow v. 5.** "Alas, master! for it was borrowed" — the word is *sha'al*, and its double life is a small theology. *Sha'al* means "to ask": it is the verb of Ps. 2:8, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee"; it is the root under king Saul's name, *Sha'ul*, "asked for." And because a thing you asked for is a thing you must answer for, the same verb means "to borrow." Hannah plays both senses in one breath over her son: "the LORD hath given me my petition which I *asked* of him: Therefore also I have *lent* him to the LORD" (1 Sam. 1:27–28) — asked and lent, one Hebrew root, one open hand. That is why the young man's cry carries such weight: under Ex. 22:14 a borrower "shall surely make it good," and in this community the making-good could cost a family its sons (2 Kgs. 4:1). But the word also quietly indicts all of us who hold anything: the axe head was borrowed, and so is everything else. "For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being... for all the substance which we have?" (Mosiah 4:19). King Benjamin built a whole discourse on what this verb knows: breath, strength, tools, sons — lent things. The God who floats the iron is defending a poor man's integrity over a borrowed object, and heaven considers that worth a miracle. What you hold on loan, the Lender watches over.

***paqach* (H6491) / *ayin* (H5869) / *ra'ah* (H7200) (פָּקַח / עֵינַי / רָאָה) — to open (the eyes) / eye / to see vv. 17, 20.** *Paqach* is a specialist. Hebrew has ordinary verbs for opening doors and gates; *paqach* opens almost nothing but eyes — a verb reserved, with rare exceptions, for the moment sight is switched on. In this chapter it fires four times in two prayers: "open his eyes" / "the LORD opened the eyes of the young man" (v. 17), then "open the eyes of these men" / "the LORD opened their eyes" (v. 20) — one opening unto comfort, one unto captivity, and both at Elisha's asking, because sight is the Lord's to grant and only his. Trace the verb and you trace a doctrine. Its first appearance is Eden: "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7) — the fall's opened eyes see exposure and fear. God opens Hagar's eyes "and she saw a well of water" (Gen. 21:19) — the provision was already there; only the seeing was missing, exactly as at Dothan. Hezekiah prays it upward, boldly: "open, LORD, thine eyes, and see" (2 Kgs. 19:16). Isaiah plants it in the messianic age: "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Isa. 35:5). And on the Emmaus road the pattern completes itself in the risen Lord's presence: "their eyes were opened, and they knew him" (Lk. 24:31). Paired here with *ayin* (eye) and the workhorse *ra'ah* (to see — running through this chapter from the axe's "he shewed him the place" to the elders' "see ye how this son of a murderer..."), *paqach* names the miracle every disciple actually needs most days: not new facts on the mountain, but the unveiled *ayin* to see what was always ranked there. The prayer of Dothan belongs in ours, and its grammar never changes — the eyes are ours, the opening is his.

***rekev* (H7393) / *sus* (H5483) / *esh* (H784) (רֶכֶב / סוּס / אֵשׁ) — chariot, chariotry / horse / fire vv. 14–17.** The chapter stages a deliberate collision of cavalries. Syria sends *sus* and *rekev* — horses and chariots, the Bronze Age's armored divisions (vv. 14–15) — and the unveiled mountain answers with *sus* and *rekev* of *esh*, of fire (v. 17). Same words, different element: heaven's army is described in the enemy's own vocabulary, plus flame. This is Elisha's second sighting. The same fire-chariots took Elijah home while Elisha cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kgs. 2:11–12) — a cry that names the *prophet* as Israel's real chariotry, its actual national defense; and Israel's king will repeat that exact cry

over Elisha's own deathbed (2 Kgs. 13:14), finally understanding what protected his kingdom all those years. What chapter 2 showed one man and chapter 6 shows two, the Psalmist counts: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels" (Ps. 68:17). And the fire is the Lord's signature element of protective presence — the bush that "burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed" (Ex. 3:2), the promise "I... will be unto her a wall of fire round about" (Zech. 2:5), and its great Book of Mormon witness: Nephi and Lehi in the Lamanite prison, "encircled about with a pillar of fire," which "burned them not" (Hel. 5:24), until three hundred watchers saw the heavens open and "angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them" (Hel. 5:48). Divine fire consumes what opposes and encircles what it loves. One chapter after Dothan, this same host wins the war without appearing at all: "the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses" (2 Kgs. 7:6) — the cavalry the servant saw is the cavalry the Syrians hear, and Samaria is saved by the sound of what only opened eyes ever get to look at.

**sanverim (H5575) סַנְוֵרִים** — **blindness** — **a sudden, dazzled bewilderment v. 18.** This word appears exactly twice in the entire Hebrew Bible, and the two scenes explain each other. Here at Dothan, and at Lot's door in Sodom: "they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness... so that they wearied themselves to find the door" (Gen. 19:11). Not the ordinary Hebrew for blind (*ivver*); *sanverim* names something stranger — a confusion or dazzlement of sight, sight unhitched from recognition. Note that the men of Sodom keep groping for the door (they can act, they cannot find), and Elisha's Syrians can march ten miles in formation (they can see enough to follow, not enough to know whom they follow). Both times the affliction is protective, not vindictive — it stands between violent men and the Lord's servants without killing anyone — and both times the striking power is angelic: the two visitors in Lot's house, the host on Dothan's mountain (and Maccabean memory keeps the pairing: enemies of heaven's horsemen end up "confounded with blindness," 2 Macc. 10:30). The theology sits in the symmetry of Elisha's two prayers: *paqach* for his servant, *sanverim* for his enemies, and the Lord answers both, because seeing is not a faculty we own but a stewardship he grants. Scripture's harder warning is that *sanverim* has a spiritual cousin that needs no prayer to inflict — "their eyes they have closed" (Matt. 13:15) — and the chapter's final panel will show a king suffering from it: perfect vision, total blindness, staring at a famine he cannot recognize as Deuteronomy 28 come due.

### From the Chapter's Architecture

*And the panels are ordered as an argument. The axe head first, so you learn the scale of God's attention before you need the scale of his armies. Dothan second, so you learn what the hills contain before the famine tests whether you believed it. The siege last — and unresolved, the chapter ending mid-crisis on a king's despair — because the text wants you to walk into chapter 7 the way the city had to: on the strength of a prophet's word, before the sound of the chariots.*