

2 Kings 8:1-6 Property Rights

One definition of insanity is repeating the same actions over and over again while expecting different results.

I'm not sure that the leaders of Israel were clinically insane, but it is true that they repeated the same actions over and over again and received the same results—increasing levels of God's judgment. And they refused to change so as to avoid God's judgment.

In the last episode in the life of Elisha, we found that God's judgment had fallen on Samaria, the capital city of Israel, in the form of a Syrian siege. The food had run out, and the people of the city had resorted to violence and barbarism. But then the Lord provided a miraculous deliverance for the city. Starving people suddenly had an abundance of food available to them at reasonable prices. God saved the city.

You might think that the people of Israel would have changed their ways as a result of this experience. God had done a miracle to save them, and they should have turned away from their idolatry and returned to worshipping God.

But they didn't do that. They continued on in their idolatry, and that led to further judgment/chastisement.

I sometimes wonder when I see people ruining their lives or doing the kinds of things that will ruin the nation—do these people not understand the results of their behavior? Do they think that there will be no consequences? Will God not bring them into judgment for their sin?

In this episode in the life of Elisha, we find that God demonstrates his special care and attention toward his faithful people even during a time of judgment. God protects his people and provides for them in unique ways.

This passage also brings up an important topic that I'd like to address in some depth—property rights.

What can we learn from this short episode in the life of Elisha?

I. .1 God judges sin.

- A. It seems that the nation didn't learn anything from the siege experience it had just been through, because some time later, the Lord called for a seven-year famine on the land. They'd experienced a rather short famine during a military campaign against them, but now they'd experience a longer famine due simply to God's judgment on their sin.
- B. Note that the Lord "called for" this famine. So it was not just a random weather pattern; it wasn't global warming. God sent this famine for a purpose.
- C. Famine for Israel was always a sign of God's judgment. The people continued in their idolatry, and the Lord continued pouring out his judgment against the nation. A seven-year famine would have been a severe hardship; you can imagine how the people suffered during that time.
- D. It's interesting that the famine was in the land of Israel and not in Philistia, which is just on the west side of Israel. The Philistines were pagans; they worshipped idols. But God doesn't punish them with a famine, at least not at this time. God brought judgment on his own people, the Israelites, because they were his own people. They knew better than to bow down to idols, yet they were doing it anyhow.

App: I think some of the difficulties we are experiencing as a nation are signs of God's judgment. Americans used to acknowledge that God was the source of our blessings. We saw God as the basis of our unalienable rights. But today, Americans, in large part, are rejecting those old, traditional ideas about rights and responsibilities.

As Americans have rejected God, God's judgment has begun to fall on us. We may not be experiencing famine right now, but we are experiencing other forms of judgment. And if things don't turn around, I think we'll see further reductions in God's blessing on our nation.

Trans: God judges sin. This famine is evidence of that. The troubles we are experiencing as a nation is an evidence of that.

- II. .1-2 God is merciful and gracious to his people.
- A. God communicated to Elisha regarding the upcoming famine, and he warned the Shunammite woman to take her family out of the region for the length of the famine.
 - B. You may recall that this was the woman who had added on a room to her house—the prophet’s chamber—so that Elisha could stay there when he was in the neighborhood. She had also had a son who had died, whom Elisha raised from the dead. All of that is earlier in the story.
 - C. .2 She and her family went to Philistia to wait out the famine. Apparently, the famine did not hit that area or was not very severe there. The woman and her family survived in a foreign land during the time of the famine.
 - D. God protected this faithful family by removing them from judgment or protecting them during a time of judgment.

App: Would it ever be necessary for us to leave America in order to protect ourselves or preserve our rights? It could happen.

Historically speaking, Christians have at various times fled their homes to avoid persecution or tyranny. The Pilgrims immigrated to America back in the 1600s to escape persecution in England. Baptists left England and lived in the Netherlands to avoid persecution around that same time.

But before we try to escape, we should try to change things for the better. We can vote people into office who will protect our rights and freedoms. So the solution in our case is not to run away but to stand and fight.

Only if conditions became very extreme would we consider moving away. But it may be a legitimate option if persecution or tyranny becomes unbearable.

We trust that, if God’s judgment falls on our nation, God would provide a means of protection for his people. E.g., Noah, Lot. We know that God keep his people safe during the Great Tribulation to come.

Trans: For the Shunammite woman and her family, God provided a way for her to escape the famine. Likewise, we can ask God to provide for us during a time of God's judgment on our land. Escape might be a reasonable thing to do.

- III. .3-5 God providentially controls circumstances for the benefit of his people.
- A. .3 After the famine, the woman returned to Israel and found a problem with her land. Someone must have been living in her house or staying on her property, because she has to appeal to the king to get her home and land back.
 - B. .4 In the providence of God, at that very same time, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was talking to the king regarding Elisha's exploits. During that conversation, Gehazi recognized the woman and verified the story about her son's death and miraculous resurrection.
 - C. .6 The king then restored the woman's property and even the income from the land during her absence.
 - D. The fact that she walks in just as Gehazi is talking about her was more than coincidence or good luck. Obviously, the Lord had orchestrated these events so that the woman showed up at just the right time for Gehazi to verify her story.

App: When we experience beneficial coincidences, we should not think of it as merely good luck or chance. If we believe in God, then we do not believe in luck. When we just happen to be at the right place at the right time, it's an evidence of God's blessings, not of good luck. It's the good providential will of God.

Trans: When positive coincidences happen, we should be thankful to God and praise him for his goodness to us. We should recognize God's blessings and appreciate them for what they are—evidence of God's care and concern.

- IV. God grants property rights.

Where do we see property rights in the passage?

- A. When the woman came back from Philistia, she appealed to the king to give back her house and property. For some unstated reason, the woman had to see the king in order to have her property rights restored.

The fact that the king grants her request and restores her property and the proceeds from it indicates that holding private property is right and good. It also shows that the government can protect property. One of the main functions of government is to protect property rights.

- B. In our country and under our political system, we take property rights for granted. Each of us can buy, sell, or hold personal property. We have the right to own stuff, and the government does not have the right to come in and confiscate it for no good reason. If the government wants to take our property, it has to pay us for it or give us another property in exchange. No one can just take what rightfully belongs to us.
- C. If someone tries to take our property, we call that theft. It's a crime and it's a sin. We have the right to protect our property from theft or destruction.
- D. Property rights are under threat when mobs or gangs or thugs take people's property or destroy it, and the police do nothing to stop it. God established government, in part, to protect property rights. Police motto: "to protect and serve." It's a great shame when the authorities don't do their job. Citizens have the right to expect the legal authorities to protect their property.
- E. Why should we care about private property rights?
 - 1. Do you own property or hope to own property some day? Do you want to own a house, a car, land, machines, buildings? Virtually all of us are or will be property owners at some point in our lives.
 - 2. It's not greedy or materialistic to buy or own property. It's not sinful to want to protect or secure what you have bought against threats of theft or destruction.

Mt 24:43 ... if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

It's "his house," and the owner of the house has the right to prevent a thief from breaking in. Breaking in and taking other people's property is sinful and criminal. We have the responsibility to prevent that from happening.

3. Most people own things because they have spent the time and effort required to earn the money to buy things. Property represents the fruit of your labor; you work so that you can buy the things that you need and want.

F. What is the biblical basis for property rights? We'll start in this passage.

1. The Shunammite woman did not lose her property rights, even though she left home for seven years. When she returned to Israel, she had the right to full control over her property. The king, as the highest legal authority, restored the property to her control.
2. God is the ultimate owner of all things (Ps 24:1). So in a certain sense, we don't own anything; we manage what God gives us. God made man his steward or manager over all the earth.
3. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were wealthy men who acquired land, herds of animals, and servants. Job, who lived about that same time, owned large numbers of animals and large tracts of land. So we have well-established patterns of property ownership in the Bible.
4. The 10 Commandments
 - a) The 8th commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," shows that we have the right to own things, and it's wrong to take things that don't belong to us.
 - b) The 10th commandment, "Thou shalt not covet anything that belongs to thy neighbor," shows that we should not even be jealous of our neighbor when he owns more than we do. We should not even desire to take anything from anyone.

- c) Systems like socialism and communism are based on covetousness. Someone else has more than I do, so the government should take from those who have and give to those who don't have. Systems like socialism and communism try to equalize everything so everyone has the same amount.
- d) But the Bible commands us not to be covetous when our neighbor has something we don't have. The Bible teaches us not to be greedy and not to steal from others. In fact, we should rejoice when our neighbors are doing well and have more than we do.
- e) There will always be inequality because people are different and people have different opportunities and abilities.

1Sa 2:7 The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

- 5. The distribution of the Promised Land to the 12 Israelite tribes
When Joshua and the Israelites conquered Canaan, the elders portioned out the land to the various tribes. Each family was to stake a claim in his tribe's section and keep it permanently.
Moses stipulated that on the year of Jubilee, "each of you shall return to his possession" (Lev 25:10).
- 6. The biblical prohibition against moving boundary markers.
Deut 19:14 You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set . . .
Moving a boundary marker amounted to theft because you were taking someone else's property without paying for it. Encroaching on someone else's property was forbidden.
- 7. When we come to the NT, we find that Jesus often spoke against wealthy, wicked people. Money, materialism, and greed can be very destructive, and Christians must avoid serving "mammon."

8. However, Jesus counted wealthy people among his supporters. The early church benefitted from those who had land and money (Acts 2:44-45). Paul tells us that we should work for a living, and that those who refuse to work should not expect to eat. If we fail to provide for our families, we prove ourselves to be unbelievers.
- G. All of this shows that the Bible endorses owning property, caring for property, and protecting property. We should not be greedy and materialistic with our property; we should be generous and share with those in need. We should use our property for the glory of God and for the good of others. In fact, it's the private ownership of property that leads to the prosperity of any community or nation. The prosperity of America is largely based on the right to own property.
 - H. The founders of our country believed that God had given us unalienable rights, and one of them was the right to own property. The government cannot simply take away our property without adequate payment.
 - I. Unfortunately, we are now seeing many instances of property rights being trampled and violated.
 1. We see rioting and looting in several cities; people are breaking into shops and businesses. People steal, break, or burn the property of others, which is both sinful and criminal.
 2. The defacing and destruction of monuments around the country show a disregard for other people's property. The mob has no right to destroy what does not belong to them.
 3. And in some cases, the government allows this to happen. In those cases, the government fails at one of its most basic duties—to protect people and property.
 - J. Unfortunately, loud voices tell us today that they don't want protection from the police. People are demanding that the police be de-funded, and cities around the nation are doing exactly that. The result is that evil people destroy more property.

- K. The only reason we need a police force is that people are wicked. Evil people do evil things; that's why we need police to protect people and property. Without a police presence, evil people will not recognize property rights; they will break in and steal whenever they can.
- L. Many today want to change our entire system of government. They want to destroy the current system and set up a system that has no guarantee of property rights. The thugs, the anarchists, the Marxists, the socialists—they are all trying to tear down basic human rights, especially the right to free speech and the right to own property. As they break and smash and burn other people's property, it becomes evident that they don't care about people or property. In fact, they see property rights as "white privilege." The desire to protect property is a sign of racism, they tell us.
- M. Many people today are advocating socialism. Socialism is a scheme whereby the government redistributes wealth. It confiscates resources from those who earn them or produce them and give them to those who don't earn or produce them. In an effort to equalize wealth, it takes property from one group and gives it to another. This is not only unjust; it is sinful. It amounts to theft.
- N. Communism does virtually the same thing, but in a more forceful and violent way. Communism takes all the property from everyone and tries to distribute resources equally. What ends up happening is that government takes control of everything and everyone becomes dependent on the government to provide everything for them.
- As Karl Marx said in his Communist Manifesto, "the theory of the Communists may be summed up in a single [phrase]: the [elimination] of private property."
- O. Unfortunately, a growing number of people want to impose socialism or communism here. If they succeed, I believe they will incur the judgment of God. Really, if they succeed, it's evidence of God's judgment. If they succeed, I'll follow the example of the Shunammite woman and go live somewhere else.

The implications of this short passage are perhaps wider than one might think. This episode in the life of Elisha shows that God's judgment falls on those who persist in their rebellion against him. When a nation is living in open rebellion against God, it can expect God's judgment.

But in the midst of national judgment, God protects his people. And part of that protection is a government system that protects the property rights of its citizens.

We live in a perilous time. Many threats against our God-given, unalienable rights exist today. If some people have their way, our property rights will continue to erode. If things keep going the way that they are, we may eventually lose our property rights, or at least see them greatly reduced.

If that happens, it's just another sign of God withdrawing his hand of blessing on our nation. For those of us who care about these things, we should do all we can to prevent our system of government from being radically altered. We need to vote people into office who will uphold and defend our constitution and our rights.

And we should trust God to protect us through this time of judgment. Even if the nation is falling apart, we expect God to provide for his people.

And if things get really bad, we might consider moving to the land of the Philistines for a few years.