



# Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

## You Should Have Struck Six Times!

Second Kings 13:14 says,

When Elisha became sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash the king of Israel came down to him and wept over him and said, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!”

Joash (also called Jehoash) was, like all his fathers, a poor example of a godly leader over Israel. “He did evil in the sight of the Lord” (13:11).

God had allowed King Hazael and the Arameans to sorely oppress Israel for many decades. In fact, in the days of Joash’s father King Jehoahaz, Israel was only able to field an army of fifty horses, ten chariots, and ten thousand men. That’s all they had left to maintain their defenses!

Even though Joash walked in the sins of his fathers, he still believed in God and believed that Elisha was God’s prophet. He had heard of the amazing deliverances that God had provided through Elisha, and his predecessor Elijah. Thus,

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when he heard Elisha was sick, he couldn't imagine how the little kingdom of Israel with its little army was possibly going to survive. It would be like having your queen taken away in a game of chess when you were already losing. The chariots and horsemen of Israel would have no chance to resist Aram without Elisha.

Elisha began making strange requests, that, at least for a bit, Joash was willing to comply with.

And Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows." So he took a bow and arrows.

Then he said to the king of Israel, "Put your hand on the bow." And he put his hand on it, then Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands.

And he said, "Open the window toward the east," and he opened it.

Then Elisha said, "Shoot!" And he shot.

Finally, Elisha explained what was going on.

And he said, "The Lord's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Aram; for you shall defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you have destroyed them.

Though Elisha was about to depart the scene through death, the power of God was certainly still able to aid Israel, His chosen nation. Thus, Elisha was attempting to leave Joash with a powerful blessing.

Elisha continued,

Then he said, "Take the arrows," and he took them.

And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground," and he struck it three times and stopped.

So the man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed it. But now you shall strike Aram only three times.

And Elisha died, and they buried him.

While we didn't get to sit there in Elisha's chambers and watch this scene play out, and see the body language and the expressions on their faces and the tone of their voices, it is clear what lesson the inspired author is trying to communicate.

Joash wasn't being humble, he was being hesitant. He lacked enthusiasm and fervency. He was reluctant to believe, and half-hearted in claiming the victory that God was ready to provide. While God could have given Israel victory thorough any means He desired, even without the agency of man, He chose to work through the king. Elisha wanted Joash to grab those arrows of victory and slam them to the ground convincingly, with exultation and exuberance! But Joash just gave a polite little "tap, tap, tap." Elisha was disappointed in him.

The conflict played out as the prophet said it would.

Hazael king of Aram had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them or cast them from His presence until now.

When Hazael king of Aram died, Ben-Hadad his son became king in his place. Then Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again from the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities which he had taken in war from the hand of Jehoahaz his father. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel (13:22-25).

Knowing, as we do, that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4), what application are we to make of this passage to our own lives?

First, we need high expectations. The "good enough" attitude has no place in God's kingdom. Did we convert two people recently? That's not enough, convert more! Is our attendance hovering near capacity? That's not enough, bring in more! Did we have a pretty good worship service? That's nice, but could be even better! It amazes me that people will update their Playstation 3.95 to a Playstation 4 the very day it comes out, or spend thousands to buy a TV with slightly better

resolution than the one already hanging on the wall, but fail to give their best to God. In spiritual matters, we should expect and aim at nothing short of complete success. Never settle for being a lukewarm, ho-hum, bench-warming, flaccid Christian—give your top notch efforts to the Lord, all the time (Heb. 5:12). He is worth every bit of it!

Second, we need to use God's tools with believing zeal. Some may say, "This little Bible and this little church can't have an impact on such a degraded and distracted community." Well, not with that attitude they can't! But with a firm faith in the gospel, the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16), this little church and this little Bible can do an amazing amount of good! And any individual willing to trust and obey can move mountains, "in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left" (2 Cor. 6:7). "God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord..." (2 Tim. 1:7-8).

Third, we need the perseverance to keep going until the job is done. Joash teaches us that hesitant faith provides partial victories, which, I suppose are better than abject defeats, but which still come disappointingly short of the fullness of the blessings that God would love to provide. It fell to another man to defeat the Arameans at Damascus (2 Kings 14:28). The one who restricted God's blessings was not God, it was King Joash. God offered him a firehose, and Joash was content to play in the sandbox with a spigot. It would seem that God would rather have us ask too much, not too little, and be diligent and busy with what He grants. "Take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (Eph. 6:13). Let us fight until the very end of our lives!

—*John Guzzetta*

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**Quote of the Week:**

"There may be people out there with more talent than you, but there's no excuse for anyone to work harder than you do."

—*Derek Jeter*