

Who was Hazael in the Bible?

Hazael, whose name is translated “God has seen,” was a high-ranking officer in the court of Ben-Hadad II, king of Aram (Syria). Later, Hazael became king of Aram himself, in fulfillment of the word of Elijah, the prophet of Israel. Hazael was an ambitious and ruthless man who ruled over Aram about 46 years.

Hazael is first mentioned in 1 Kings 19:15 when God told Elijah the prophet to “go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.” Elijah obeyed, but Hazael was not made king until years later.

Hazael’s Wickedness

Hazael remained a court official under Ben-Hadad until the time of Elisha, Elijah’s successor as Israel’s prophet. Ben-Hadad was gravely ill. Elisha traveled to Damascus and was met by Hazael, who had brought “forty camel-loads of all the finest wares of Damascus” as a gift from the king (2 Kings 8:9) along with a query from the king about whether he would recover from his illness. Elisha gave Hazael a paradoxical answer: “Go and say to him, ‘You will certainly recover.’ Nevertheless, the Lord has revealed to me that he will in fact die” (2 Kings 8:10).

Elisha, in speaking with Hazael, began to weep (2 Kings 8:11). Hazael asked why the prophet was weeping, and Elisha said, “I know the harm you will do to the Israelites” (2 Kings 8:12). Hazael expressed doubt, citing his lack of authority, and Elisha repeated God’s prophecy that Hazael will be king (verse 13). Hazael returned to Ben-Hadad, and “the next day he took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and spread it over the king’s face, so that he died. Then Hazael succeeded him as king” (2 Kings 8:15). It is likely

that Hazael had been planning the murder for some time and that his response to Elisha's prophecy was feigned surprise. God had seen the treachery in his heart.

Hazael's Military Might

During his reign as king, Hazael led the Arameans in battle against the combined forces of King Jehoram (Joram) of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah, whom he attacked at Ramoth-Gilead (2 Kings 9:14). Jehu became king of Israel, and Hazael went on to take more Israelite territory: "Hazael overpowered the Israelites throughout their territory east of the Jordan in all the land of Gilead (the region of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh), from Aroer by the Arnon Gorge through Gilead to Bashan (2 Kings 10:32-33). Israel suffered these losses due to the idolatry of King Jehu; it was the Lord who "began to reduce the size of Israel," using Hazael as the means (verse 32).

Hazael also seized the city of Gath (2 Kings 12:17) and came against Jerusalem in Judah. There his military campaign ended. "Joash king of Judah took all the sacred objects dedicated by his predecessors—Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah, the kings of Judah—and the gifts he himself had dedicated and all the gold found in the treasuries of the temple of the Lord and of the royal palace, and he sent them to Hazael king of Aram, who then withdrew from Jerusalem" (2 Kings 12:18).

God's Providence

God used the cruel Hazael to punish the nation of Israel for her wickedness. During the entire reigns of Joab and Jehoahaz of Israel, Hazael and his son oppressed Israel. The reason was the evil that Israel pursued (2 Kings 13:2-3). Hazael's oppression was so

severe that “nothing had been left of the army . . . except fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers, for the king of Aram had destroyed the rest and made them like the dust at threshing time” (2 Kings 13:7). Eventually, King Jehoahaz sought the Lord’s favor, and “the Lord provided a deliverer for Israel, and they escaped from the power of Aram” (2 Kings 13:5). This prophecy was fulfilled when Jehoash was able to recapture the towns that Hazael had taken from Israel (verse 25).

Elisha’s Prophecy

In the midst of the oppression of Hazael, King Jehoash of Israel went to Elisha the prophet to inquire about what God said about the matter. Elisha, who was on his deathbed, told Jehoash to shoot an arrow out the window to the east. Elisha called it “The Lord’s arrow of victory” and said, “You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek” (2 Kings 13:17). Then Elisha told Jehoash to shoot arrows into the ground. The king shot three arrows and then stopped. Elisha was angry with the king’s lack of zeal, saying, “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times” (2 Kings 13:19).

Hazael’s Death

In time, God put an end to Hazael’s reign, and he was succeeded by his son, Ben-Hadad III (2 Kings 13:24). God raises up kings and puts them down again (Daniel 2:21; cf. Romans 13:1). He can even use a wicked man like Hazael to orchestrate His plan. And, afterward, Aram was held accountable for their cruelty: “This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not relent. Because she threshed

Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, I will send fire on the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad''' (Amos 1:3-4).

Through all the trouble that Israel has suffered, from Aram and other countries, God remains faithful to His covenant with them. As the biblical historian noted, even during the oppression of Hazael, "the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence" (2 Kings 13:23).