

**Research: axe head floating and King of Syria**  
**II Kings 6:1, 2 (to 1st.), 4–10**

1 And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.

“The place where we dwell with thee.—Rather, *the place where we sit before thee*: habitually, for instruction. The common hall is meant; whether that at Gilgal or at Jericho is uncertain. Jericho was close to the Jordan (2Kings 6:2), but that does not prove that it is meant here. The prophet’s disciples did not live in a single building, like a community of monks. Their settlement is called “dwellings” (*nāyôth*) in the plural (1Samuel 19:18); and they could be married (2Kings 4:1).

Too strait.—Their numbers had increased” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“The place where we dwell with thee - literally, "the place where we sit before thee," i. e. "the place where we assemble and sit to hear thy teaching." Elisha visited the sons of the prophets in circuit, staying a short time at each place where a "school" was established. Perhaps he was now visiting Jericho” (Barnes’ Notes).

2 Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell.

“The Jordan valley was well timbered. We see from this, as from previous passages, that these men did for themselves such work as they required. Here they are ready to be their own carpenters. Naturally such a body would neither wish for, nor be able to erect, anything but a building of the simplest sort.

“*make us a place there*] They propose to provide entirely new quarters in a new spot in the valley of the Jordan” (Cambridge Bible).

“A piece of timber for the building. Hence it may be gathered, that although the sons of the prophets principally devoted themselves to religious exercises, yet they sometimes employed themselves about manual arts” (Benson Commentary).

4 So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood.

“Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan—whose wooded banks would furnish plenty of timber” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

5 But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.

“The Jews used iron for the heads of axes at a very early date (see [Deuteronomy 19:5](#)). They probably acquired a knowledge of the smelting process in Egypt, where iron was employed at least from the time of the third Rameses” (Barnes’ Notes).

“The tree must have been one that grew close to the river’s edge. As the man hewed away at the stem a little above the root, the axe-head flew from the haft, into which it was insecurely fitted, and fell into the water. The slipping of an axe-head was a very common occurrence ([Deuteronomy 19:5](#)), and ordinarily was of little consequence, since it was easily restored to its place. But now the head had disappeared” (Pulpit Commentary).

*“Alas, master, for it was borrowed!”* — He was the more concerned, both because he was now compelled to be idle and useless to them in the common work, and because it was his friend’s loss, who was now likely to suffer for his kindness in lending him the axe; for though justice obliged him to restore it, his poverty rendered him unable” (Benson Commentary).

6 And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.

“The iron ax-head did not swim, but simply rose to the surface. It had fallen in near the bank. Elisha’s throwing in the stick was a symbolical act, intended to help the witnesses to realise that the coming up of the iron was not a natural, but a supernatural, event, brought about through the instrumentality of the prophet...It indicated that iron could be made to float *like wood* by the sovereign power of Jehovah. The properties of material substances depend on His will for their fixity, and may be suspended or modified at His pleasure. The moral of this little story is that God helps in small personal troubles as well as in great ones of larger scope. His providence cares for the individual as well as the race” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“At another time, Elisha helped a school of prophets seeking a solution to its growing numbers. He accompanied the students down to the Jordan, where they were building larger headquarters. Once there, they had to provide their own building materials and tools, and needed to borrow many of them. When at one point an axe head flew off its handle, an outcry resulted. (The Hebrew meaning of the word "borrowed," or "asked for," indicates that the axe head may have in fact been "prayed for," which would have made the tool even more precious.) As Elisha inquired about where the axe head had

been thrown, one can almost see him looking to the omniscient Lord of heaven and earth from whom nothing can escape, rather than looking into the swirling river.

The stick that Elisha then tossed into the water, seemingly with the intent of finding the axe head, certainly had no power to do so. Yet, contrary to the laws of matter, but consistent with the law of the Lord, the axe head emerged from the bottom of the river and then rejoined the building crew where it belonged. Elisha's method of finding the axe head was not to hunt for the lost object itself, but to resort to an action that must have seemed mysterious to anyone who may not have been aware that Elisha did all things through the help of the Lord" ("Looking Up" Olene Carroll, May 2006, CSJ).

7 Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.

"Elisha does not take the axe-head out of the water himself, but requires the scholar to do it, in order to test his faith. He must show that he believes the miracle, and regards the iron as really floating on the top of the water, not as merely appearing to do so" (Pulpit Commentary).

8 Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp.

"The king of Syria – probably the great Benhadad" (Barnes Notes).

"The sacred text informs us that 'the king of Syria was warring against Israel'—indicating rather a state of chronic warfare and marauding expeditions, such as are common in the East, than a regular campaign. In his consultation with his 'servants' what place to occupy, there seems to have been a scheme to lay an ambush for the capture of the king of Israel, when Joram was on a hunting expedition, or else when he passed from one place to another" (Edersheim 790).

"the king of Syria warred against Israel—This seems to have been a sort of guerrilla warfare, carried on by predatory inroads on different parts of the country. Elisha apprised King Jehoram of the secret purpose of the enemy; so, by adopting precautionary measures, he was always enabled to anticipate and defeat their attacks" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

9 And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.

"Pass.—*Pass over, across, or through.*

*“Such a place.—This place*

*“Thither.—There.*

*Come down.—Coming down “for there the Syrians are about hiding or lurking” (Ellicott’s Commentary).*

10 And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.

*“sent to the place]* A single messenger, against whom the Syrians would do nothing, would be enough to find out whether the prophet’s warning were true.

*“not once nor twice]* i.e. but several times” (Cambridge Bible).

“Time after time the Israelite king and his forces were delivered from ambush because of Elisha’s warning, for by divine revelation Elisha was party to the Syrian king’s secret plan. Elisha’s aid to Jehoram became common knowledge and was duly reported to the Syrian king who had suspected a traitor within his own court” (EBC 4.194).