

=UNUSUAL BIBLE STORIES=

Lesson 7

The Axe Head That Swam

SCRIPTURE: II Kings 6:1-7

AIM: to teach my pupils the spiritual lessons in the story of the axe head that swam

POINT OF CONTACT: Bring an axe or a hammer to class, showing the pupils how easily the axe head or hammerhead could be severed from the handle. The entire lesson is built around such a story.

INTRODUCTION: There was a school of the prophets, or better still, one could call it a seminary. Elisha was the leader of the school; he was also the successor of Elijah as leader. The number of prophets and preacher boys was growing so rapidly that they found themselves in need of more space. They decided to build a new dwelling on the banks of the Jordan River to save the trouble of conveying the materials a long distance. Hence, they went to the banks of the Jordan, where there was plenty of wood, and there they built a new dwelling place. While they were chopping down the trees, one young preacher lost an axe head. Obviously he was cutting near the Jordan River, and the axe head fell into the Jordan. He was vitally concerned because it was a borrowed axe. He came to the prophet, Elisha, and asked him what could be done, or at least he told him of his predicament and lamented the fact that he had lost the axe head that he had borrowed. Elisha cast a stick into the water, and the Bible says that the axe head swam.

What a miracle! The young prophet reached out and took the axe head, placed it back on the handle, and continued working. There are several practical lessons to be learned through this beautiful miracle.

- I. THE NUMBER OF YOUNG PREACHERS NEEDS TO INCREASE. In II Kings 6:1, notice especially the words, "...the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us." America needs young prophets, young men of God. Because of this, every Christian young man should ask himself the question, "Does God want me to be a preacher?" This should be the first consideration of every Christian young man. (Teachers, stress this heavily to the boys' classes.)
- II. THERE NEEDS TO BE A CONSTANT STARTING OF NEW INSTITUTIONS OF TRAINING FOR THESE PREACHERS. Institutions are like parades; they pass by, they change, they pass off the scene. There should be new ones started constantly. Pray for God to raise up such institutions in America.
- III. THOSE TRAINING TO BE LEADERS MUST FIRST LEARN TO BE FOLLOWERS. These young scholars would make no change without the sanction of their master. Notice II Kings 6:1. This is always the case in the Bible. Before Joshua can be a leader, he must be a follower of Moses. Before Ezekiel can prophesy to the people, he must first go to the banks of the river and sit where they sit for a while. (Teach the pupils that in order to be successful as leaders later they must first be cooperative and willing followers.)
- IV. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT ALL JOIN IN THE WORK. In II Kings 6:2, notice the words, "...and take thence every man a beam." It is important that every Christian work. There is a load for everyone to carry; there is a job for everyone to do. How important it is that we find and do that job!
- V. EVEN THE MAN OF GOD SHOULD BE STRONG PHYSICALLY. These preachers were building the seminary. They were building places to live. They were cutting down trees. Certainly every Christian should take care of his body and not be afraid of hard work. It is vitally important that parents teach their children to work hard. For that matter, they should not only teach them to work hard, they should give them duties to perform. This is one of the problems in America today. When our youngsters were reared on farms and had the many rural duties to perform, we grew better people; but now in our urban society we are stacked on top of each other, and it takes more ingenuity on the part of the parents to see to it that the children are taught to work.

- VI. THESE YOUNG MEN STAYED AROUND THE MAN OF GOD. II Kings 6:3a, “And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants.” One of the number was not satisfied with the prophet’s mere approval of the enterprise but wished for his actual presence. This is a very vital thing for any person. He should find a man of God and be sure he stays near him. That is why God gives us men to lead. He wants people to stay close to them. Don’t forget that God works through men. God leads through men. Every Christian should have close proximity to a man of God.
- VII. A YOUNG MAN LOST AN AXE HEAD. See II Kings 6:5. The blessing and power of God upon us can be lost so easily. He should have made more sure of the position of the axe head on the handle. He was careless, however, and lost the axe head. We should be very careful that we keep the power and blessing of God upon our lives and should constantly be securing the blessings of God, or we will lose the axe head on the handle. We find from Deuteronomy 19:5 that the Hebrews made their axe heads of iron as early as the time of Moses. They probably learned to smelt and work with iron while in Egypt. We also find in this verse that the slipping axe head was a very common occurrence. The slipping of a Christian is a very common occurrence also. Let us take care lest we lose the breath of God upon our lives.
- VIII. IT WAS A BORROWED AXE HEAD. See II Kings 6:5b. The man said to Elisha, “Alas, master! for it was borrowed.” Now the slipping of an axe head was a common misfortune, but it was not so common for one to lose a borrowed one. What the man is saying is, “It wouldn’t be so bad if it were my own axe head, but I borrowed it. Now what can I say to the owner?” Here is a blessed picture of stewardship: All we have is borrowed! Now let us look at the matter of stewardship. A steward is one who uses another’s possessions or property and is to care for it. God has given us many such possessions.
1. Life. The life we have is not our own. God gives us life. It is borrowed. We are not to lose it or waste it, but as good stewards, we are to use the life God has given us for Him.
 2. Strength. The very energy we have, the air we breathe, the strength we have—these are God’s. As good stewards, we are to care for our strength properly. We are using Another’s property. We are to care for it.
 3. Our time. God allots to us our time. As good stewards, we are to use the time wisely and for His glory.
 4. Our money. God gives us money. As good stewards, we are to use it properly and give at least one tenth to Him. (Teacher, stress tithing here. Stress that all we have belongs to God, and He wants one tenth of it back.)
- IX. THE MIRACLE. Read II Kings 6:6, 7. Elisha cut down a stick and cast it in the water where the axe head was, and the Bible says, “...the iron did swim.” He then told the man to reach out and take it.

Two natural explanations of this miracle have been advanced: 1) That Elisha passed a piece of wood under the axe head which he could see lying at the bottom of the river and then lifted it up to the surface, and 2) that he thrust a stick or bar of wood through the hole of the axe head to retrieve the axe head and pull it out. Neither explanation is true! The word “cast” means to throw. He literally “threw” the stick into the water. For that matter, if either of those explanations were true, why would God have told the Holy Spirit to put this in the Bible? Sacred writers are not concerned to put on record mere acts of man. The Holy Spirit placed this here for us because it was miraculous.

Elisha did not take the axe head out of the water himself but told the young preacher to do it in order to test his faith. He had to show that he believed the miracle and regarded the iron as really floating on top of the water, not merely appearing to do so.