

# The Problem of Depravity

by Denis Lyle

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*The problem of depravity is the tendency of humans to be wicked and sinful, often hiding behind a mask of respectability, and God uses wicked people to accomplish His purposes.*

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 8:7, Psalm 48:14, Jeremiah 17:9, Acts 4:29, Romans 8:28

**Topics:** "Human Depravity", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

Denis Lyle preaches on 'The Problem of Depravity' by highlighting the bleak future projections of societal decay and moral decline as depicted in a special edition of TIME MAGAZINE. The sermon delves into the root cause of human wickedness and evil, attributing it to the depravity of the human heart, as stated in Jeremiah 17:9. The narrative in 2 Kings 8:7-15 illustrates this concept through the characters of Hazael, Elisha, and God, showcasing the deceptive nature of human ambition and the contrasting godly character of Elisha. The passage also emphasizes God's sovereignty over the affairs of men, using even wicked individuals like Hazael to fulfill His purposes.

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## Transcript

2 Kings 8:7-15 THE PROBLEM OF DEPRAVITY A special edition of TIME MAGAZINE entitled "Beyond the Year 200: What to expect in the Next Millennium", recently gave us a glimpse into the near future. As Time's editors and sociologists projected into the future, the view was not a pretty one. What will USA and the Western World look like in the year 2000 What will our culture look like Where are we headed as a society What will be our lifestyle Well, here is the picture that is being painted.

MULTIPLE MARRIAGES: "The family as we know it will soon die", they predicted. It will be nothing more than mere blip in human history. Replacing it will be "serial monogamy." WIDESPREAD DIVORCE: "Divorce will be so common as to be considered normal. Some marriage contracts will have sunset clauses... to automatically terminate at a given date." WOMEN LIVING TOGETHER: "Many women will live with other women." MULTIPLE PARENTS: "Children will live with a bewildering array of relatives... mothers, fathers, stepmothers, multiple stepfathers, stepbrothers, stepsisters, grandparents, former grand parents."

INCEST: "The taboo against incest will weaken." CHILDLESSNESS: "The trend toward childlessness will accelerate." CHILD ABUSE: "Children will be routinely victimized... many children will have no one to care for them. SEXUAL EXPLOSION: "Pediatricians will teach children about sexual relations at the time of their vaccinations against disease." ATHEISM: "Theology, the study of God and the Bible will soon die."

FEMINISM: "The triumph of feminist religion will cause many to shun references to God in personal masculine terms". (No more "Heavenly Father ") ABORTION: "Forced abortion, such as China imposes on its women, will be necessary in nations with exploding populations".

It's not a pretty picture is it But if Christ tarry this is the world in which our children, our grandchildren, and we will find ourselves. Why Why even at this present time is there so much crime and cruelty in our modern world Have you ever been perplexed about injustice, war, murder, rape, drugs and a host of other problems in our sick society Why... in spite of increasing literacy, education and material benefits... Does the tide of wickedness and evil continue to rise The Bible teaches us that the answer lies in the depravity of the human heart.

"The heart of the human problem is ever the problem of the human heart". "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it" (Jer 17:9) Now in (2 Kings 8) we are provided with a very clear illustration of The Problem of Depravity. Elisha, in the course of his ministry travelled to Damascus, the capital city of Syria. At this time, Ben-hadad, King of Syria was seriously ill. Elisha's arrival was promptly reported to the King, who immediately dispatched one of his couriers to inquire of the prophet regarding the possibility of recovery from his illness.

At this point, the spotlight falls on Hazael, whose aspiration and ambition is unveiled by Elisha. Now as we look at this passage we notice that 3 persons are doing something. Hazael: Elisha: and God. (1) THE PURPOSE OF A DEVIANT SERVANT Hazael is perhaps one of the most repulsive characters presented in Scripture. You see when he undertook this mission for his King, he already had resolved upon his murder. At the same time, he took measures to deceive, and if possible to gain Elisha.

What was this man's purpose What was his goal What was his aim and objective in life He simply wanted to be King. (8:11, 15) He aspired to be number 1 in Syria, he was a man hungry for more power. (1) Now notice that this: (a) MAN'S PURPOSE WAS DISGUISED: Isn't the human heart skilled in disguise and deception My... as we meet Hazael in this passage we never suspect him of having planned in his heart deeds of murder. Indeed he is actually in the service of the man whom he intended to murder and whose throne he planned to usurp.

No doubt he was a trusted servant, no doubt he was someone to whom Ben-hadad looked for counsel and guidance. Yes, a cursory look at this man would make you believe that he was generous (8:9) obedient (8:9) respectful: (8:9) courteous (8:9) but the veneer of respectability covered a heart that was "desperately wicked." Ill: Have you ever walked across a field and turned up a flat stone Only to see a brood of hideous insects rushing in every direction to hide themselves from the light that poured in upon them!

My, if the shield of respectability was suddenly removed from us and we were left naked and open before the God with whom we have to do, would be ashamed as believers For those secret sins... of lust: of bitterness: of jealousy: of gossip: of falsehood: of pride: of unlawful ambition would be revealed My, are we all that we profess to be Could it be that we are playing the part of the hypocrite as Hazael was Yes, (a) but this: (b) MANS PURPOSE WAS DISCLOSED: For as Hazael stood before Elisha, the prophet saw that Hazael was nothing less than a dirty bird of prey, a vulture perched menacingly on the crooked branch of his own filthy ambitions.

For this man's foremost desire and drive was to be ruler. Do you recall that it was Lucifer's aim to be like the most High " I will exalt my throne above the stars of God". (Is 14:13) You see, Hazael simply reflected

the craving of his master, Satan. But Elisha saw him as he was cruel and callous: ambitious and arrogant. In vision he saw him reaching the throne of Syria, and leading the Syrian armies in cruel border raids on Israel (10:32 Amos 1:3-5) He saw the terrible atrocities for which Hazael would yet be responsible.

I tell you this man's purpose had been disguised from the king: but it was disclosed by the prophet. How many people there are like Hazael: (1) **POLITICALLY**: In our century we have seen what power hungry men have done to nations like Russia, Germany, Iran, Iraq and Uganda. Are there not many in the world of politics who are interested only in personal advancement and ambition (2) **INDIVIDUALLY**: My, we may be consciously impressing others with our gifts and graces in order to gain applause and support.

But the veneer of spirituality covers many a dark ambition, which, while kept secret is promoted slyly at every opportune moment. (3) **ECCLESIASTICALLY**: that is in church work. For "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence", is still found in many a church. (3 John 9) III: J.Vernon McGee writes, "There is generally one like him in every church, who wants to control the church and the preacher, this man tried to be the first pope. He was Diotrephes the Dictator". Now listen there are only 2 places in the NT where the word "preeminence", occurs.

Do you know where the other one is Well, in(Col 1:18) Paul says "That in all things He might have the preeminence". You see it will always be either Self or Christ! My, as far as I am concerned in this church there are no big shots or little shots... Christ ought to be number one! Now come back to our passage. We have here (1) (2) **THE PORTRAIT OF A DEVOUT SAINT** It is interesting that in desiring to know whether or not he would recover from his illness Ben-Hadad did not send to the priests at the Temple of Rimmon where he regularly worshipped (5:18) At this critical time he didn't want RELIGION he wanted REALITY!

So the King who only recently sought Elisha's life (6:13) now seeks Elisha's help. (8:8) Did you notice how Elisha was referred to even in enemy territory "The man of God is come hither". Here's the first snapshot we have of Elisha in Damascus. He was: (a) **GODLY IN CHARACTER**: Listen to the cry again that rang through the streets of Damascus and penetrated the halls of the palace, "the man of God is come hither". (8:7) Elisha, was now regarded even in Syria as "the man of God".

In this psychedelic age, the term "man of God", indicates wild and weird and woolly freaks. But My, in the Bible it meant a man who kept company with the Almighty. Do you recall what Elijah said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand". (1 Kings 17:1) When you're accustomed to standing before God kings don't matter much. Big potentates are just small potatoes when you have been standing in the presence of the Most High. My, this is where Elisha stood. In the presence of God.

"The man of God is come hither". (8:7) I wonder how are we known What do others in their daily business with us take note of Do they know you as an angry man: a proud man: a clever man: a man who knows how to look after his own interests How will you be remembered in this generation and in the next, in this world and in the next (a) (b) **BOLD IN SPEECH**: Notice what he says in (8:10) The explanation was simple. The King would recover from certain death by "natural causes", only to die by "unnatural causes,"namely by the murderous hands of Hazael, the king's successor.

Looking into Hazael's eyes that day, Elisha not only saw his murderous intent towards his sick monarch, he also saw the hatred which the Syrian bore for Israel. (8:12) My, Elisha was not in Damascus to heal a leper: to restore a dead child to life but rather to announce the death of a king. (8:10) (b) Is this not what the Early Church prayed for "Lord... grant... that with all boldness they may speak thy Word". (Acts 4:29) "And they spake the Word of God with boldness". (Acts 4:33) Boldness is one of the great words of the NT

Indeed as used in the NT boldness contains three shades of meaning. (1) It means COURAGE TO SPEAK: What is our biggest problem in witnessing to lost people Fear!

But the Holy Spirit gives us courage to speak. (2) It means CLARITY OF SPEECH: The ability to make clear and plain the message of Christ. (3) It means CONFIDENCE IN WHAT WE SPEAK: This is the heart-assurance that what we say will be driven home by the Holy Spirit. My... Are you bold (not ignorant) in your witness Are you praying that I might be bold in mine (Eph 6:19) Elisha was (a) (b) (c) TENDER IN HEART: For we read in (8:11) "And the man of God wept". Why Because he saw the sickening atrocities Hazael would perpetrate indiscriminately on the inhabitants of Israel. (8:12) This man who began his career as the patron saint of the euthanasia lobby (in 8:15 he turned off the king's life-support system when there was every hope of survival) would later advance to abortion and killing of infants.

Elisha saw this and wept. (9:14-15 10:32 12:17-18 13:3 22-24) And who would not weep if he saw these horrors come upon his country Sad to say, the horrors of Hazael have come upon our land! My, our land is reeling under the burden of drink: drugs: abortion and now they're talking about "mercy killing". But where are "the men of God", who nowadays weep for Ulster Where are the believers who are burdened about the spiritual and moral state of our land They're not even out at the place of prayer!

" And the man of God wept". (8:11) He wept because of the Temporal Horrors that were to come upon Israel, do you weep when you think of the Eternal horrors that will come on unsaved souls (2 Thes 1:9) III: As a lad of 17 years of age William Burns visited Glasgow for the first time with his mother. He was greatly moved because of the many sad faces he saw. In the crowds he got lost. Eventually his mother found him, kneeling in an alley weeping bitterly. "What ails you lad, are you ill" " Oh, mother, mother", he sobbed, "the thud of those many Christless feet on the way to hell breaks my heart".

My, when did we last weep for souls When did we last weep for lost souls: lost sons: lost relatives: lost friends "And the man of God wept". (1) (2) (3) THE PLAN OF A DIVINE SOVEREIGN That's the final lesson we want to grasp from this passage. God is sovereign over the affairs of men. And God used Hazael to accomplish His purposes. Indeed he was raised up to inflict judgment on Israel for the idolatry of God's people. (3:3) Look at: 1 Kings 19:15 This command was not fulfilled by Elijah but by Elisha and in the manner recorded for us in (2 Kings 8) So there was the Assassination of the King: there was Hazael's Accession to the throne: there was Syria's Attack on Israel, these were the results of Hazael's depravity, but behind it all God's Plan was unfolding! (a) THE PEOPLE THAT GOD USES: Are sometimes wicked, yet through them He accomplishes His purposes.

Why did God choose to use Hazael To inflict judgment on Israel. That's why we read, "In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel". (10:32) My, God knows what He is doing and He can even make the vessels of wrath serviceable for the fulfillment of His purposes! This is: (b) THE PERSON THAT GOD IS: Sovereign over all the affairs of men. Do you recall Daniel's words "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men". (Dan 4:17) My, God is in Control NATIONALLY: III: Do you know what Napoleon said on the morning of the Battle of Waterloo "We will put the infantry here, the calvary there, the artillery here.

At the end of the day England will be at the feet of France and Wellington will be prisoner of Napoleon". The commanding officer said, "But we must not forget that man proposes but God disposes". With arrogant pride the little dictator stretched his body to full height and replied, "I want to understand Sir, that Napoleon proposes and Napoleon disposes". Do you what happened God sent rain and hail so that the

French troops could not maneuver as planned, and on the night of the Battle it was Napoleon who was prisoner of Wellington, and France was at the feet of England.

God is in control NATIONALLY. Are you anxious about the election Trust Him. But My, God is in control PERSONALLY. "And we know". (Rom 8:28)My, God is in control. Lets look to Him: depend on Him: trust in Him for "this God is our God for ever and ever He will be our guide even unto death". (Ps 48:14)

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