

# **Greatest Questions**



## **Ever Asked**

**Where Did the Ax Head Fall?**

Steve Flatt



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***Randolph Dunn***

President

[IBKI.English@gmail.com](mailto:IBKI.English@gmail.com)

Website: [thebiblewayonline.com](http://thebiblewayonline.com)

## Where Did the Ax Head Fall?

At first glance this question might not be considered one of the greatest questions ever asked or any significance or implications to your life. But by the time we're finished, perhaps, you will see some things that are extremely important in your walk with God.

Elisha is the great prophet in Israel, the successor to his mentor, Elijah. Elisha has begun a school for future prophets. It has grown to the point that their present facility was too small. So they've gone to a new site and begun clearing land for the new facility.

"The company of the prophets said to Elisha, 'Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan, where each of us can get a pole; and let us build a place there for us to live.' And he said, 'Go.' Then one of them said, 'Won't you please come with your servants?' 'I will,' Elisha replied. And he went with them. They went to the Jordan and began to cut down trees. As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water, 'Oh, my lord,' he cried out, 'it was borrowed!' The man of God asked, 'Where did it fall?' When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float. 'Lift it out,' he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it." (2 Kings 6:1-6)

Most of us haven't spent a lot of time as lumberjacks, but you can picture the scene. Most of the men have handled an ax at one time or another and you know that the centripetal force from swinging that ax over and over again eventually loosens the ax head. So as this young seminarian lumberjack began to swing away, on one swing, the ax head loosened to the point that it flew off the handle and into the river. It's a simple story, and in it the prophet asked a very simple question. In verse six, he inquires, "Where did the ax head fall?"

From that question, I want to make a spiritual application. Much more can be learned than the fact that one day a long time ago, he made a piece of iron float. The God who created a trillion galaxies and who put everything on the face of this earth, who came to this earth in the form of His Son, who healed the sick and cured the lepers, who made the lame to walk, the God who is going to come back again and melt all of creation in a fervent fire, didn't need to go out of his way to show me that a five-pound piece of iron could float. No, I think this ax head stands for something.

The ax head represents the **POWER GOD WANTS TO CHANNEL THROUGH YOUR LIFE**. In other words, the ax head represents the tools that God places in your hands to effectively do his work. This young seminarian lumberjack, like the Christian today, was applying his presence and his effort to do something worthwhile for God. But he found out that without an ax head, the presence and the effort weren't enough. You don't cut down trees without the ax head being in place and being sharp. I think this lesson is going to hit home with lots of folks today.

The very fact that you are reading this lesson indicates where your interest and your efforts are. But how many trees are you felling for God? How productive are you in your Christian life? How satisfied are you right now with the fruit of your labor? See many Christians just like this young student. They've lost their ax head. They're not what they could be. They're not what they should be. In many cases, they're not even what they used to be. There's a lot of effort expended, but such little fruit received. Oh, they still go through the motions, still swing and swing and swing and rub elbows with

real lumberjacks. They talk about the days when the trees used to fall. That was something, but not many trees are falling for them now. No fruit, no power, no joy, they've lost the ax head.

It reminds me of a story I heard about a young lumberjack who went into a camp as a rookie. The first day, he was prepared, ready and gung ho when he went out. All day long he worked up in the great northwest and by the end of the day he had felled 20 huge trees. When he got back in camp around that campfire, he was bragging about how well he did. One of the veteran lumberjacks put his arm around him and said, "You know I believe 20 might be a first day record for a rookie." He continued "Top men around here do 30 trees a day. You keep it up, I believe in a short period of time, you'll be right there." The next day that rookie lumberjack eager to impress, got up 15 minutes earlier, he cut 15 minutes off his lunch hour, he pounded and hammered, and sawed away. Finally, when he finished at the end of the day, only 18 trees had been felled. He was rather depressed. He said, "I'll get up 30 minutes earlier tomorrow, I'll work all the way through my lunch hour." The third day, only 16 trees had fallen. By the end of the week, he was down to about a dozen. Swallowing his pride, he kind of moped his way into camp and he talked to that veteran lumberjack and said, "I don't understand." He said, "The harder I try, the be-hinder I get." The veteran lumberjack asked, "Have you taken the time to sharpen your ax head?" The young man looked up, rolled his eyes, sighed and said, "No. I didn't take time to sharpen the ax head because I had so much to do."

Folks, I believe if God were to lean over right now and whisper something in many of our ears, something he would whisper in the ears of preachers, elders, deacons, Bible school teachers, counselors and ministry workers, he would whisper, "Have you taken the time to sharpen your ax head?" He might even ask, "Have you taken time to see if it's still in place?" Have we just keep swinging and swinging and swinging and wondering why we're not getting anywhere.

See if we've lost the ax head or if the ax has become dull, our work becomes very difficult because it's not designed to be that way. If you've lost the ax head, the joy of fruitfulness for God is ebbed. Your prayer life becomes stagnant. The zealotness, the earnestness is gone. The joy of being in Christ, which is supposed to be like a fountain welling up inside of us, just dries up. We don't see any fruit.

I thought about another story I read about some time ago at a university in the northwest. It involved lumberjacks as well, it was a study on motivation. The psychology department took two groups of lumberjacks. They paid one group of men the same price that they had been making, the same wage, to just go what they had always done—just chop down trees. The second group was told "We want you to use the flat edge, the blunt edge of the axe but we'll pay you twice your regular wage. We just want you to pound it against the tree, just keep going. Do it as long as you want; we'll pay you double wages." The test group using the blunt edge of the axe had all quit within half a day. As the last lumberjack from that test group was walking away, he was shaking his head. In his exit interview he said, "Money, or no money, this is no fun. When I swing the ax, I have to see the chips fly." A lot of us become worn and tired and weary and even bored because we're swinging the ax, but we're not seeing the chips fly. No fruit, no results, no joy. Some simple observations from the story of the ax head

1. *The ax head was borrowed.*

It wasn't the property of the one who was using it. "As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water 'Oh, my lord,' he cried out, 'it was borrowed!'" (2 Kings 6:5) What need to understand that our spiritual ax head, that cutting edge that God wants us to have, is the power we have to minister joyfully to others, the power that we are going to have to teach others to share our faith with Christ, the power that God is going to give us to overcome temptation and the power that we are going to have to lead our families in a righteous way. It's not a personal power. It is a God-given power. It is borrowed in a sense. You don't work up this power through psychology or build it up through your own willpower. It's a divine power that comes from Jesus Christ and his spirit living in you. It's a gift from God. It's not your power or my power, it's God's power.

Some Jews had returned home to Israel from Babylonian captivity eager to rebuild their temple. Just like a lot of us, they got started, laid the foundation and then they got tired. They lost their ax head. For 16 years, not one stone was turned as they left the foundation in place. Zechariah was a prophet sent back when the Jews had been released from Babylonian captivity. He said, "We can't just stop with the foundation, let's start building the temple." The people were all discouraged saying, "It was hard work just to do the foundation. We don't think we can ever build the whole temple." God told Zechariah "So God said to me ... 'Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit,' says the Lord Almighty." (Zechariah 4:6) God told Zechariah, your arms aren't strong enough, your minds aren't smart enough, your hearts aren't courageous enough and your plans aren't good enough. If the temple is ever rebuilt, it will be because my Spirit causes it to happen.

The Spirit of God is the keen, sharp edge of the ax head. That's the difference. The power that you have to resist temptation, to share your faith, or to influence your family for Christ, it's not a power created by your own energy, it is the gift you receive when you came to Christ. It's a borrowed power. Don't dare lose sight of it, ignore it or lose it. If we lose it trying to take on this world without God's power through his Holy Spirit, it's like trying to fell a great redwood by beating it with the ax handle. You get nowhere fast. It's a borrowed power.

## **2. *The ax head was lost.***

While he was working the ax head slipped off the handle and fell into the water. It was lost. Where do we lose our spiritual ax heads in our walk with God? Has anybody ever lost it in the waters of worldliness? Has anybody swung it in the rivers of ritual? Has anybody lost their ax head in the creek of criticism? Did it fly off into the pond of prayerlessness or the stream of secularism? Is your ax head in the swamp of self-satisfaction? It can go to any number of places. But if we have lost it, what are we going to do about it? There's nothing sadder than losing the power that God wants his servant to have. The ax head was lost.

## **3. *There was a concern over its lost.***

As soon as he realizes it was gone, Elisha's helper cried out, "'Oh, my lord.'" He was distressed. I venture to say that there's not a one of us whose walk with God hasn't had at one time or another to go look for their ax head. There are times that we've got to stop and re-check our priorities. When we realize something is missing we've got to repent and we've got to start again. If you've never done that, I suggest that you start looking for your ax head because you've lost it and don't know it. You see there's concern when it's lost. It thrills me that this fellow was greatly disturbed over losing it.

Too many times we go through religious rituals, go through the activities and say the right things, act the right way, we've got it so down pat and we don't even realize we've lost the ax head. We don't expect anything great from God and we don't ask anything great from Him. If the biggest thing we ask from God is to bless our meals, then it's possible for us to go through life and to lose that power and not even know it.

It's not what is done for God that matters nearly as much as what is done by God through us. I think we miss that point a lot of times. We all want to do something for God, but that's not nearly as important as what's done by God. So many times we substitute activity for productivity. We say, "Well, I've done this for God, I've done that for God or I've gone over there for God." We need to stop and ask: "Have I done it in and with the power of God?"

Activity isn't always productivity. We stay busy doing things, things for the church and things for other people. But, we also need to stop and ask: "Am I doing things for God, or is God doing things through me?" The former is good, but the latter is much better. The former, doing things for God, creates activity. But the latter, lets God creates productivity. Productivity occurs when the ax head is in place and sharp. I don't want to pray, "God, bless what I am doing." I want to pray, "God, show me what you're doing, and make sure I'm in that blessing."

4. The ax head was found where it was lost.

When the helper said, "'My lord, I've lost the ax head and it's borrowed,' the man of God (that's Elisha) asked, 'Where did it fall?' When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there and made the iron float." Now folks, I know it's simple, but look at this. The ax head was found right where it was lost. Spiritually, that's the same way it is with our walk with God. If you've lost your spiritual ax head this morning, you're going to find it in the same place you lost it.

Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son? Where did the boy go to find the ax head? He went right back where he left it. He left it at home when he walked out and went to a far country. When he came to himself, he went home and there it was. Do you know where some of you need to go to find your ax head? Some of you need to go get your dusty Bible off the shelf and read it. Some of you need to go to that quiet place you had one time. You need to get on your knees and pray again because it's been a long time. That's where you left your ax head. Some of you need to return to your spouse.

Matthew 18 says, "Sometimes, we left our ax head with another brother." It doesn't have to be in your immediate family. Reconcile with a brother before you worship. Why? Because until you do, you've lost your ax head. You've lost your source of spiritual power. Some of us just need to humble ourselves before God, the Father, because our stubborn pride has sapped away our spiritual power. "Where did you lose it?" That's where it's going to be found.

I don't know where you've left your ax head, but you know where it was. Go there, that's where you will find it.

1. *The one who lost it had to be the one who retrieved it.*

After it was floating, Elisha looked at the man and said, "'Lift it out.' Then the man reached out his hand and took it." You say, "What's the significance of that?" You are responsible for you ax head. No one can relieve you of that.

You see the prophet said, "You go in the water and pick it up for yourself." The good news is, if you make that determination, that's exactly what you can do. To me one of the most amazing concepts in all Scripture is that God gives us the power to choose. God has chosen only to use human beings to accomplish his will for the most part. Incredibly, he gives us the power of choice to determine how much power from him is going to be channeled through us. Yet, by one thought, word or choice, we determine whether any power will go through us. As long as you choose to let the ax head stay in the water, that's where it will stay. If you choose to pick it up. God can bless your life in a mighty way. Amazing Grace #1274 Steve Flatt, July 28, 1996

### Student Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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