



Second Kings - Chapter Four

II 2 Kings 2:1-10:36 - Elisha and Israel (continues)

Summary of Chapter Four

Both Elijah and Elisha are now associated with the God who provides water at will, whether by ordinary means, i.e. wind and rain as in 1 Kings 18:45, or not, i.e. neither wind nor rain as in 2 Kings 3:17. A number of further miracles serve in the same way as a reminder of Elijah.

Firstly he helps the widow of a fellow prophet who only has a single jar of oil yet it fills many containers which she sells. Thus she can pay off her late husband's creditors and stop her sons from going into slavery.

A wealthy Shunammite woman and her husband showed true hospitality to Elisha and his servant and so Elisha wanted to bless her in some way but she said she had all she needed. Elisha discovered that she was childless and was passed the age of childbearing and yet the prophet announced she would have a son, and it was so. However, the child grew sick and died, so the woman went to Elisha. He returned to the woman's home, prayed to the Lord, laid on the child and breathed into him. The Lord restored the child's life and he was returned to his mother.

A company of prophets made a stew during a time of famine that included wild gourds that were poisonous. When they began to eat the stew they realised that it was harmful to eat it and so they cried out to Elisha. He simply added a small amount of flour and the stew became edible.

Finally, Elisha instructs that a small amount of food, only twenty loaves of barley bread and some grain, should be served as a meal for one hundred men. It was clearly insufficient but Elisha said the Lord has said they should eat for there would be plenty and some left over. And it was so.

II.c [2 Kings 4:1-44 - Elisha's Miracles](#)

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.c.i [2 Kings 4:1-7 - Elisha and the Widow's Oil](#)

Indebtedness was a common problem throughout the ancient Near East and could lead to the loss of property, home, fields, and ultimately the freedom of the debtor: *<<And there were those who said, 'We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax. Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others'>> (Nehemiah 5:4-5), <<Thus says the Lord: Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away>> (Isaiah 50:1), <<Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals>> (Amos 2:6), and: <<We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat>> (Amos 8:5b-6).*

Persons and property ending up in the hands of creditors could often be redeemed as in Ruth 4:1-12 and Jeremiah 32:6-15, and among the responsibilities of the kinsman redeemer in an extended Israelite family was the maintenance or redemption of the person or dependents of a kinsman in debt; refer to Leviticus 25:35-55. In the apparent absence of a true kinsman for the widow in this story, Elisha as the leader of the prophetic communities effectively takes on this kind of role for her. The proceeds from the sale of the multiplied oil will leave her and her sons sufficient money to live on even after she has paid off her debts. Note the similarities between this account and that of Elijah supporting the Widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:8-16.

¹ Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha, 'Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves.'² Elisha said to her, 'What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?' She answered, 'Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil.'³ He said, 'Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbours, empty vessels and not just a few.'⁴ Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside.'⁵ So

she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. ⁶ When the vessels were full, she said to her son, 'Bring me another vessel.' But he said to her, 'There are no more.' Then the oil stopped flowing. ⁷ She came and told the man of God, and he said, 'Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest.'

2 Kings 4:1-7

Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha. Elisha was now the established head of the prophets and he had a responsibility to care for them and their dependents. Therefore, this poor widow turned to him in a time of great distress.

A creditor has come to take my two children as slaves. This woman, the widowed wife of one of the company of prophets, had debts and no means to pay them. The legal system in Israel would not allow her to declare bankruptcy; she had to give her sons as indentured servants to her creditor as payment for the debts. However inhumane this might seem, the creditor was within his rights; for Mosaic Law allowed him to enslave the debtor and his children as far as the Year of Jubilee in order to work off a debt. However, the law did state that they should be treated not as slaves but as hired workers; refer to Leviticus 25:39-43.

Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil. The use of an unusual Hebrew word here provides some evidence that this jar of oil was not a larger supply held for cooking but a smaller vessel that held only oil for anointing.

Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbours, empty vessels and not just a few. Elisha made this woman commit herself in faith to God's provision. To borrow vessels in this manner invited awkward questions, but she did as the word of God through his prophet commanded her. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "She did what she was commanded to do: she did it in faith; and the result answered the end. God takes care to deliver his servants in ways that exercise their faith. He would not have them be little in faith, for faith is the wealth of the heavenly life."

It should be noted that there is a distinction between apparently unanswered prayer and faith. Just because prayer does not seem to be answered in a given circumstance is not necessarily a sign that the person does not have faith. It is simply God's will not to answer that prayer, at that time or in the way that the people praying wish it to be answered. People without faith will not truly pray in the first place.

Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children. The Lord was going to provide through miraculous means but it was not to be undertaken publically.

Start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside. Elisha told the woman to take what she had - one jar of oil which was all that she had - and to pour that out in faith into the borrowed vessels. As she did this the oil miraculously kept pouring from the original vessel until all the borrowed vessels were filled. At the end of it, she had a lot of oil.

It should be noticed that Elisha made her do this. Perhaps Elisha was tempted to gather the vessels and pour the oil himself, but he knew that she had to trust God herself. As stated above, the original vessel of oil, i.e. the one the woman had in her house was a smaller vessel that held only oil for anointing. This means that the distribution of the oil into the other vessels required constant pouring, allowing the oil to supernaturally fill the small vessel again.

Again, Spurgeon commented, “The vessels also had to be empty before they could be filled with oil. It did no good to bring the widow full vessels. A full Christ is for empty sinners, and for empty sinners only, and as long as there is a really empty soul in a congregation so long will a blessing go forth with the word, and no longer. It is not our emptiness, but our fullness which can hinder the outgoings of free grace.”

When the vessels were full, she said to her son, ‘Bring me another vessel.’ But he said to her, ‘There are no more.’ Then the oil stopped flowing. The miracle was given according to the measure of her previous faith in borrowing vessels. She borrowed enough so the excess oil was sold and provided the money to pay the debt to the creditor and to provide for the future. Had she borrowed more, more would have been provided; had she gathered less, less would have been provided. The principle of this miracle was the same as the principle of the ditches dug in the previous chapter. The amount of man’s work with the miracle determined the amount of blessing and provision actually received. God’s powerful provision invites hard work and never excuses laziness. As the apostle Paul puts it: **<<For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat>>** (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

II.c.ii 2 Kings 4:8-37 - Elisha Raises the Shunammite’s Son

In return for all that a wealthy woman from Shunem has done for him, Elisha offers to assist her with the king. When she refuses, Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, suggests that the childless woman might appreciate the promise of a son. Despite her protests, for fear of false hopes because she was past the age of childbearing, the woman conceived and bore a son, just as Elisha had promised. Several years later, the son of the prophet’s promise mysteriously dies. His mother’s decisive action and determined response bring them both to the prophet at Mount Carmel, who immediately responds to her distress, matching her decisive and determined action with prayer that results in the resuscitation of the lifeless boy.

The story, clearly reminiscent of Elijah's resuscitation of the widow's son in 1 Kings 17:17-24, is told with considerable literary skill. An important difference lies in the lack of a statement testifying to the prophet's power or God's activity, where the previous account is quite explicit: <<*The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived*>> (1 Kings 17:22). This probably means that the intention of the story is not to legitimise Elisha's call as in the Elijah tale. The story has influenced the story of Jesus' raising of the widow's son in Luke 7:11-17.

⁸ One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal. ⁹ She said to her husband, 'Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. ¹⁰ Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us.'

2 Kings 4:8-10

One day Elisha was passing through Shunem. Shunem is located to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee and was in the land given as an inheritance to the tribe of Issachar; refer to Joshua 19:17-19. It was where the Philistine army came to battle with King Saul in 1 Samuel 28:4.



Map showing Shunem

Where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. This remarkable relationship between Elisha and the Shunammite woman began when the woman sought to do something for the prophet. Elisha did not seek anything from this woman; she eventually persuaded him to accept her hospitality as the guest in their home.

Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. The woman did not know Elisha, had not seen his miracles or heard him prophesy, but there was something about him that made her believe he was a prophet. It may simply have been the way he dressed but it seems more likely that there was something about him that made her believe.

Isaiah foretold something of the Messiah: *<<he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him>> (Isaiah 53:2b). And yet the disciples were drawn to him when he called them: <<And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him>> (Mark 1:17-18).*

Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us. The Shunammite woman then sought to do more for the prophet. With the approval of her husband, they made a room for Elisha to stay in on his frequent travels through the area. Roofs in ancient Israel were typically flat and served as important areas in the life of the family, as seen in Joshua 2:6-8, 2 Samuel 11:2, 2 Kings 23:12, Jeremiah 19:13, and Acts 10:9, providing among other things temporary guest accommodations; refer to 1 Samuel 9:26, 2 Samuel 16:22, and 1 Kings 17:17-24. The structure in question here, however, is more permanent for it had walls.

Jesus later commented on such hospitality: *<<Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous>> (Matthew 10:41), as did the apostles: <<Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers>> (Romans 12:13), and: <<Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers>> (3 John 5-7).*

¹¹ One day when he came there, he went up to the chamber and lay down there. ¹² He said to his servant Gehazi, 'Call the Shunammite woman.' When he had called her, she stood before him. ¹³ He said to him, 'Say to her, Since you have taken all this trouble for us, what may

be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?’ She answered, ‘I live among my own people.’¹⁴ He said, ‘What then may be done for her?’ Gehazi answered, ‘Well, she has no son, and her husband is old.’¹⁵ He said, ‘Call her.’ When he had called her, she stood at the door.¹⁶ He said, ‘At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son.’ She replied, ‘No, my lord, O man of God; do not deceive your servant.’

2 Kings 4:11-16

Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army? Elisha offers the Shunammite woman benefits, through his patronage, from the king or the commander of the army – two of the most powerful people in the land. She has no need of their help, however, because she is wealthy (v.8) and, living among her own kinfolk, i.e. my own people, and therefore has their support and protection. She is not vulnerable like the widow in vv.1-7.

At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son. To this barren woman this promise seemed too good to be true. The stigma associated with barrenness was harsh in the ancient world, and this promised son would answer the longing of her heart and removed the stigma of barrenness. Her disbelief would have been similar to that of Sarah when she heard the Lord state she would have a child in her old age: <<*Then one said, ‘I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?’>> (Genesis 18:10-12).*

¹⁷ The woman conceived and bore a son at that season, in due time, as Elisha had declared to her.

2 Kings 4:17

The woman conceived and bore a son at that season, in due time, as Elisha had declared to her. The woman who so generously provided material things for the prophet of God was now blessed by the God of the prophet, blessed beyond material things and blessed beyond the ability of nature.

¹⁸ When the child was older, he went out one day to his father among the reapers.¹⁹ He complained to his father, ‘Oh, my head, my head!’ The father said to his servant, ‘Carry him to his mother.’²⁰ He carried him and brought him to his mother; the child sat on her lap until noon,

and he died.²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, closed the door on him, and left.²² Then she called to her husband, and said, 'Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again.'²³ He said, 'Why go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath.' She said, 'It will be all right.'²⁴ Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, 'Urge the animal on; do not hold back for me unless I tell you.'^{25a} So she set out, and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

2 Kings 4:18-25a

Oh, my head, my head! The precise illness suffered by the young boy is not diagnosed but most commentators favour sun stroke for he probably laboured through the heat of the day with no adequate protection.

The child sat on her lap until noon, and he died. This was the son granted by miraculous promise, in reward to the faithful service of the Shunammite woman. The boy tragically died on the lap of his mother after a brief but severe affliction.

She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, closed the door on him, and left. Although her initial dialogue with Elisha appears to be accusatory her actions here seem to indicate that she expected a miraculous recovery for her son for she did not prepare him for burial as would have been the normal custom.

Because of the climate funerals normally took place before sundown but before that the corpse would have been prepared and mourners would have gathered as seen in the account of the death of Jairus' daughter: <<When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother. They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, 'Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping'>> (Luke 8:51-52).

He said, 'Why go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath'. The implication to be drawn from the husband's response is that it was customary in Israel to consult prophets only on particular rest days, such as the new moon marking the beginning of each month, and the Sabbath: <<And they kept the festival of booths, as prescribed, and offered the daily burnt-offerings by number according to the ordinance, as required for each day, and after that the regular burnt-offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the sacred festivals of the Lord, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill-offering to the Lord>> (Ezra 3:4-5), <<I will put an end to all her mirth, her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals>> (Hosea 2:11), and: <<Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and

bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?>> (Amos 8:4-5a); refer also to 1 Samuel 20:5-34. The practice of celebrating on the first of the month had ancient roots; the new moon was already one of the principal lunar festivals in Old Babylonian times. This woman's business, however, will not wait.

She said, 'It will be all right.' The woman does not want to tell her husband that their son is dead. Had she done so then she would have brought grief upon him and would have been prevented from going to Elisha as she would have been required to stay and mourn for her son as he was prepared for burial. She is not lying to or being deceptive towards her husband but demonstrates faith that somehow her son will be restored to life.

So she set out, and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. Elisha was once more on the mountain where Elijah had demonstrated God's supreme power and the priests of Baal had been killed for their apostasy; refer to 1 Kings 18:19-40.

^{25b} When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, 'Look, there is the Shunammite woman; ²⁶ run at once to meet her, and say to her, Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is the child all right?' She answered, 'It is all right.'²⁷ When she came to the man of God at the mountain, she caught hold of his feet. Gehazi approached to push her away. But the man of God said, 'Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.'²⁸ Then she said, 'Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not mislead me?'²⁹ He said to Gehazi, 'Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, give no greeting, and if anyone greets you, do not answer; and lay my staff on the face of the child.'³⁰ Then the mother of the child said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave without you.' So he rose up and followed her.³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. He came back to meet him and told him, 'The child has not awakened.'

2 Kings 4:25b-31

She answered, 'It is all right.' This is the same response that she gave to her husband in v.23. All is not really well, but she did not want either her husband or Gehazi getting in her way as she seeks Elisha's help. She wanted to be the one to tell Elisha and for him to see her grief for himself.

Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me. Elisha had not foreseen this happening. Prophets are not omniscient, but depend always on God's revelation. Elisha seemed mystified that this woman, whom he presumably often prayed for, was in a crisis that was hidden from Elisha. In this circumstance Elisha was more surprised that God did not speak to him than if God had spoken to him: *<<Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets>>* (Amos 3:7).

Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. As the woman had arrived at Carmel in great haste (v.24), so Elisha sends Gehazi back to Shunem in similar haste, his garment hitched up so that he can run, as was also seen in the account of Elijah on Mount Carmel: *<<But the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; he girded up his loins and ran in front of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel>>* (1 Kings 18:46).

The phrase 'gird up your loins' can also mean 'prepare yourself' as in: *<<Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me>>* (Job 38:3 and 40:7), *<<But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them>>* (Jeremiah 1:17), and: *<<A shatterer has come up against you. Guard the ramparts; watch the road; gird your loins; collect all your strength>>* (Nahum 2:1).

If you meet anyone, give no greeting, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. It was common courtesy to greet people and to pass some time with them when they were encountered on a journey. In order that Gehazi should not be delayed in his task he is commanded not to follow normal protocol but to ignore anyone he meets and to keep going until he arrives at the woman's house.

Lay my staff on the face of the child. Instead of going directly himself, Elisha sent his servant Gehazi with his staff. This seems to follow the previous pattern in Elisha's ministry: he did not do things for people directly, but gave them the opportunity to work with God and to trust him for themselves.

Then the mother of the child said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave without you.' The woman is not willing to accept Elisha's plan to resurrect the boy from a distance by means of his staff; she wants his personal attention, which in the end does in fact prove crucial. Only his own prayer and mysterious actions succeed in bringing the boy back to life, as was the case when Elijah intervened to revive the son of the Widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:19-23.

It may be that the Shunammite woman failed under this test, because she thought that the power to heal was more connected with Elisha himself and she refused to leave his presence. The child was not healed by the laying on of the staff, although hypothetically the child may have been healed with only the

staff if the Shunammite would have embraced this promise with full faith. This is exactly what happened when the official had faith that his son could be healed by Jesus from a distance: <<*The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my little boy dies.'* Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.' *The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.'* The father realised that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' *So he himself believed, along with his whole household>> (John 4:49-53).*

³² When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. ³³ So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. ³⁴ Then he got up on the bed and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm. ³⁵ He got down, walked once to and fro in the room, then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. ³⁶ Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, 'Call the Shunammite woman.' So he called her. When she came to him, he said, 'Take your son.' ³⁷ She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left.

2 Kings 4:32-37

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. This is confirmation that the child was actually dead and not just in a comatose state, as some have suggested. What follows is not artificial respiration but full restoration of life by the Lord.

So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. God did heal the Shunammite's son in response to Elisha's prayer. He prayed after the pattern shown by his mentor Elijah in 1 Kings 17:20-23. Elisha prayed with great faith because he knew God worked this way in the life of his mentor Elijah. He also prayed with great faith because he sensed that God wanted to raise this boy from the dead.

This was the same reaction that Peter had when he was called to a dead widow: <<*Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.'* Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up>> (Acts 9:40).

Elisha's actions vividly picture God restoring breath to the child (putting his mouth upon his mouth), as well as sight (his eyes) and strength (his hands). As

Elisha stretched himself upon him, it portrayed the Spirit of God who, through Elisha, was being imparted into the child to give him life.

Paul performed a similar restoration process when Eutychus fell from an upper floor window: <<*But Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him'*>> (Acts 20:10). Although there is no reference to Paul praying it is clear that the Holy Spirit was at work through him on that occasion.

This level of intimate contact would have made Elisha ceremonially unclean under the Mosaic Law but Elisha knew that this was a work of the Lord and came into his presence through his prayers. This is once again an indication that the law was made for the benefit of humankind and not the other way round, as seen when the disciples were accused of breaking the Sabbath Law by plucking grain: <<*Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath'*>> (Mark 2:27-28).

There is a significant contrast between the stretched out supplication of Elijah and Elisha and the authoritative command of Jesus in raising the dead as in John 11:43. Elijah and Elisha rightly begged God to raise the dead. Jesus commanded the dead to be raised.

All eventually will hear the voice of Christ calling them to judgement. Their eternal future, however, is determined by how they had responded to it in this life: <<*Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*>> (John 5:28-29).

The flesh of the child became warm. The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. Some of the miracles that God performs come about immediately, while others take a little more time: <<*He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly*>> (Mark 8:23-25).

Take your son. Elisha returned the child to his mother as did Elijah before him and Jesus centuries later. The writer to the Hebrews acknowledges his belief in this: <<*Women received their dead by resurrection*>> (Hebrews 11:35a).

She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left. The woman showed her respect and thanks in this way. There was nothing really to be said at such a miraculous outcome.

II.c.iii 2 Kings 4:38-41 - Elisha Purifies the Pot of Stew

During a time of famine a company of prophets make a stew out of items gathered from the fields. As they ate it they found that it was unpalatable, or even poisonous. So they called on Elisha who sprinkled a little flour into the stew and immediately it became edible.

³⁸ When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. As the company of prophets was sitting before him, he said to his servant, 'Put the large pot on, and make some stew for the company of prophets.'³⁹ One of them went out into the field to gather herbs; he found a wild vine and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were.⁴⁰ They served some for the men to eat. But while they were eating the stew, they cried out, 'O man of God, there is death in the pot!' They could not eat it.⁴¹ He said, 'Then bring some flour.' He threw it into the pot, and said, 'Serve the people and let them eat.' And there was nothing harmful in the pot.

2 Kings 4:38-41

There was a famine in the land. Elisha's third miracle is reminiscent of the healing of the water at Marah by Moses in Exodus 15:22-27, or by Elisha at Jericho in 2 Kings 2:19-22. The famine mentioned may be the seven year famine alluded to in 2 Kings 8:1-3. Famine is the context in which the whole succeeding narrative up to Chapter 8 takes place, although a general state of famine does not imply an absolute absence of food (vv.42-44).

One of them went out into the field to gather herbs; he found a wild vine and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds. The gourds were probably colocynth. Popularly called wild cucumber, the vine still grows near the Dead Sea. When the gourds are cut open, the pulp dries rapidly and forms a powder, which in that part of the world is still used as a cathartic medicine. It has a very bitter taste. If eaten in enough quantity, it induces colic and can be fatal.

O man of God, there is death in the pot! Elisha felt a special responsibility to help in this situation because he told the men to gather ingredients for the stew, and they gathered the wild vine that poisoned the pot. As with the salt thrown into the water at Jericho in 2 Kings 2:21, the flour used by Elisha is a visible sign of the Lord's power working through Elisha.

Charles Spurgeon commented, "You have been trying to find pleasure in the world, and you have found wild vines . . . you have gathered wild gourds, a lap full, almost a heart full. You have been shredding death into the pot, and now

you cannot feed as you used to feed, the poison is stupefying your soul. While we were singing just now, you said, ‘I want to sing as saints do, but there is no praise in me . . .’ If you are a worldling, and not God’s child, you can live on that which would poison a Christian; but if you are a child of God, you will cry out, ‘O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!’”

And there was nothing harmful in the pot. There was nothing inherently purifying in the flour Elisha put in the pot. The real purification was a miraculous work of God. Again, Spurgeon states, “There is death in the pot; how is the Church to meet it? I believe it is to imitate Elisha. We need not attempt to get the wild gourds out of the pot, they are cut too small, and are too cunningly mixed up; they have entered too closely into the whole mass of teaching to be removed. Who shall extract the leaven from the leavened loaf? What then? We must look to God for help, and use the means indicated here. Bring meal. Good wholesome food was cast into the poisonous stuff, and by God’s gracious working it killed the poison; and the Church must cast the blessed gospel of the grace of God into the poisoned pottage, and false doctrine will not be able to destroy men’s souls as it now does.”

II.c.iv **2 Kings 4:42-44 - Elisha Feeds One Hundred Men**

In an account that brings to mind the feeding of the multitude by Jesus, Elisha gives instruction that the meagre stock of twenty barley loaves and some fresh grain should be used to feed one hundred people and that food would be left over.

⁴² A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, ‘Give it to the people and let them eat.’ ⁴³ But his servant said, ‘How can I set this before a hundred people?’ So he repeated, ‘Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, “They shall eat and have some left.”’ ⁴⁴ He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

2 Kings 4:42-44

Bringing food from the first fruits. The final miracle of the chapter also concerns provision for the people who depend on Elisha. A limited amount of food is once again multiplied (vv.1-7), despite the incomprehension of the **servant**, so that it not only provides immediate needs but also produces a surplus. It is the final demonstration in the chapter that the God of Elisha heals, provides, and brings life from death.

The food had been brought to Elisha as first fruits. Normally these portions were reserved for God as stated in Leviticus 23:20, and the Levitical priests according to Numbers 18:13 and Deuteronomy 18:4-5. Because the religion in the northern kingdom was apostate, the loaves had been brought by their

owner to the one whom he considered to be the true repository of godly religion in Israel.

Give it to the people and let them eat. In a miracle that anticipated Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand in John 6:1-14, Elisha commanded that a small amount of bread be served to one hundred people. There, too, the food was served by disciples and not by the one commanding it to be served.

For thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left." God promised not only to provide, but to provide beyond the immediate need. Elisha trusted the promise of God, acted upon it, and saw the promise miraculously fulfilled. Charles Spurgeon said, "What can these few cakes do towards feeding a hundred men? They forget that God can multiply them. Ye limit the Holy One of Israel. Do you think he needs our numbers? Do you think he is dependent upon human strength? I tell you, our weakness is a better weapon for God than our strength." That is why the apostle Paul could write: <<*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness*>> (2 Corinthians 11:30).