

2 Kings 4:1-44

More Miracles through Elisha

The rabbis said that because Elisha received a "double portion" of the Spirit from Elijah, that the number of his miracles would be twice those of Elijah. The miracles of Elisha point toward the even greater miracles performed by Jesus.

This chapter records five miracles - the overflowing supply of oil, the birth of a son to a barren woman, the bringing back to life of that same son, and the poisonous stew made clean and feeding of 100 with only a little.

We'll look at the first three this week.

The Widow's Oil

2 Kings 4:1 - "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."

"sons of the prophets" always means the disciples of the prophets, according to the Targum.

The husband who had died was known to Elisha because she said "thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD."

Josephus (Antiqu. l. 9. c. 4. sect. 2) suggests that the insolvency of this man was owing to his borrowing money to feed the prophets hidden in the cave; and it is a common notion of the Jews that this creditor was King Jehoram the son of Ahab.

2 Kings 4:2 - "And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil."

God always meets us where we are. The word for "pot" indicates it was a small jar, a flask used for anointing.

In the same way the previous miracle of the ditches required preparing receptacles for the promised flood of water, the widow needed to find vessels to contain the oil. She was told to borrow as many empty vessels as she could.

This was an odd, awkward request from neighbors who perhaps knew of her precarious debt situation.

2 Kings 4:4 - "And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is

full."

Why shut the door? We'll see this also in the miracle of raising the dead son.

Rashi says "It affords respect to the miracle if it comes about in secret." This is probably the same principle as when Jesus says:

- **Matthew 6:6** - "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly".

Shutting the door is also used to imply security:

- **Isaiah 26:20** - "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

It also points back to Israel gathered in their rooms in Egypt, eating the Passover lamb, protected by the blood on the doorposts as the death angel flew overhead.

When the door is closed it limits the possibility of our injecting personal pride, hypocrisy, or vanity into the mysterious workings of God.

Notice also that Elisha did not simply clap his hands and have a tanker truck full of oil appear. The widow herself gathered the empty vessels, and she also had to trust God herself. Again, we have to provide the empty space for God to fill. She also had to pour the oil from the small flask into each vessel. This was a series of small miracles - each time she poured, the flask would fill up again.

Each vessel had to first be gathered and placed in the right position, and then had to be empty to receive the oil.

Once the empty vessels were filled, the oil stopped flowing.

2 Kings 4:7 - "And she came and told the man of God: and he said, "Go sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons will live with the remainder."

As is usual with God, more than enough was provided.

Recall: Elijah and the Widow (1 Kings 17)

If this all sounds familiar, it's because Elijah performed similar miracles - giving a widow a promise that her barrel of grain and cruse of oil would not run out until the drought was over. He also raised alive the widow's dead son, as Elisha does in this chapter.

These miracles were important not only for their own sake, but as a sign that the prophet was genuine and speaking the words of God. Elisha repeating the miracles of Elijah showed that he had the same Spirit in him as his predecessor had.

The Shunammite Woman

2 Kings 4:8-10 - "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."

The Talmud says she was the sister of Abishag the Shunammite, and the mother of Iddo the prophet. (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Bathra, fol. 57. 2.

Elisha was continually traveling, following a circuit to visit the different schools of the prophets and to go to Mount Carmel where Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal.

After accepting her hospitality, Elisha has his servant ask the woman of she needs anything.

2 Kings 4:13 - "And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people."

i.e. she is secure with an extended family and community to support her and her husband.

Then he asks his servant privately what her real need is.

2 Kings 4:14 - "And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old."

Barrenness was a reproach to a woman in ancient times.

So Elisha makes her a promise.

2 Kings 4:16-17 - "And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life."

But some years later, the boy, now maybe 6 or 7, goes out to join his father with workers reaping a harvest, and suffers an illness of some kind - a heat stroke, brain hemorrhage? He dies with his head in his mother's lap.

2 Kings 4:21-22 - "And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and

shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again."

She did not bury the boy. Perhaps she had heard that Elijah had raised the widow's son of Zarephath to life (**1 Kings 17**) and was hoping for a similar miracle. She seems to have even have kept his death a secret from her husband.

(In fact, this recalls Isaac, who as the child of promise through whom the world would be blessed, expected to be resurrected as he was bound to the altar.)

She doesn't reveal her problem until she is face to face with the prophet.

2 Kings 4:27 - "And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me."

Note: Elisha wasn't afraid to say he was at a loss, that "the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." This is great humility for a prophet.

This was also a test for Elisha. Why had God not revealed to him the death of the boy and the mother's grief?

Take note of Gehazi the servant's actions. He "came near to thrust her away." This is reminiscent of Jesus' disciples trying to run off the little children that were coming to Him. Or to Judas' objection to Mary similarly grabbing Jesus feet, washing them with her tears and pouring the expensive perfume.

There's something spiritually wrong with Gehazi, which we will discover in the next chapter.

2 Kings 4:28 - "Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?"

Targum: "Did I not say unto thee, if a child is given me, let it live, if not, do not trouble or grieve me"

So Elisha sends his servant to hurry to the woman's home and lay his staff - a symbol of his authority - on the boy's face. Elisha and the Shunammite woman follow more slowly.

But laying the staff on his face had no effect.

It was indeed cruel for God to promise the woman a son she had not asked for, and then take him away in death. At this point, Elisha might have given up and given in to disappointment himself. He might have started second guessing his promise - was it really from God? He might even question his calling as a prophet.

Instead he enters the little prophet's guest room where the boy was laid out and shuts the door.

There's that shutting of the door again!

He was expecting a miracle. He knew that Elijah was faced with almost the same situation, so he did what Elijah had done - he laid down on top of the boy. The rabbis said he "prostrated himself" - an act of supplication before God - on the boy's body.

2 Kings 4:34 - "And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm."

This offers a picture of Jesus who became flesh, rescuing us from death by becoming one of us, stretching Himself out on us, "as us" - eye to eye, mouth to mouth and hand to hand, bringing us out of our deathly state of sin through His incarnation.

When Jesus was faced with similar situations, He spoke a word of command or called forth the dead. He raised the widow's son in the village of Nain (**Luke 7:15**). He raised the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue (**Mark 5:42**). He raised Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha in Bethany after he had been dead four days (**John 11:44**). And he raised himself from the dead after he had been crucified, with the authority given to Him by the Father (**John 2:19-21, 10:18**).

Jesus not only raised the dead, he provided complete victory over death.

"Death is swallowed up in victory..." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. (**1 Corinthians 15:54-56**)

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (**John 11:25-26**)

Apparently. Elisha did this once and then paced back and forth in the woman's home before returning to the room and repeating the procedure, until the boy sneezed and opened his eyes.

2 Kings 4:36 - "And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son."

Summary - Emptying precedes filling. That's evident in the first miracle about the vessels of oil. In the second miracle, Elisha symbolizes the emptying by his prostration before God. He's at the end of his rope, not understanding why the boy died. But he "shuts the door" expecting a miracle. His spiritual emptiness allows God to pour out life to the boy through him.