

2 Kings 4:38-44

'Death in the Pot': Purification of the Pottage

2 Kings 4:38 - "And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets."

This was a stew with barely any ingredients.

2 Kings 4:39 - "And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not."

The gourds were colocynth, popularly called 'wild cucumber' from a vine that still grows near the Dead Sea. It is very bitter, induces vomiting and if enough is ingested can be fatal. The rabbis instead believed these were poisonous mushrooms.

2 Kings 4:41 - "But he (Elisha) said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot."

This is different metaphor than emptying to be filled. In this case the pot is defiled and poisonous - a poison that can't be extracted.

Throwing the meal into the pot recalls Moses throwing a "tree" or a piece of branch into the bitter waters of Marah in the wilderness. The waters became sweet. The rabbis said the branch was engraved with the name of God (Exodus 15:22-25) and was itself bitter, according to the Targums. The tree/branch is the Cross, and Christ Himself.

The rabbis said this incident actually happened at Passover. Eating the unleavened bread and drinking the wine at the Afikomen show the same picture. Bitter waters are made sweet. The poisonous effects of the Fall infecting our human nature is transformed when the cross is introduced. The bitter tree becomes the tree of life.

Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai explains the phrase "Vayorehu Hashem etz" ("the LORD showed him a tree") as "God taught Moses Torah." According to this interpretation, the "etz" in the verse refers to "etz hayim hee," meaning "it (the Torah) is a tree of life."

"It [the Torah] is a Tree of Life for those who grasp onto it" (**Proverbs 3:18**).

The rabbis agree that the branch of the tree itself was bitter, although it transformed the bitter waters into sweet. A beautiful literal reading from the Zohar suggesting that it was a piece of wood from the Etz Hayim – the original Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.

Also, the passage doesn't exactly say that the waters were bitter, it only states, "they were bitter." Some rabbis said it was the Israelites who were bitter, which made the

waters taste bitter to them. The Midrash adds that the bark of the tree that G-d showed Moshe was itself extremely bitter (Midrash Shemot Rabbah 23:3). The cross, a bitter tree indeed, is what sweetens life, as Christ is the fulfillment and completion of Torah.

This also reminds us of the Red Heifer, out of whose ashes the waters of cleansing were made (Numbers 19:1-22). Like the tree thrown into the bitter waters, the ashes thrown into the waters of cleansing were transformative. These waters were to cleanse someone who had touched a dead body.

Recall that Elisha had previously performed a similar miracle by throwing salt into the bitter waters at Jericho, with God saying "I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness." (2 Kings 2:19-22)

Feeding a Hundred Men

2 Kings 4:42-44 - "And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD."

Since those in the northern kingdom of Israel were cut off from the levitical service of the Temple in Jerusalem, apparently some gave first fruit offerings to the prophets, like Elisha and his disciples. (Leviticus 23:10)

2 Kings 4:43-44 - "And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD."

Here 20 loaves of barley and some sheaves of (wheat?) grain were divided among 100 men, with an unspecified amount left over.

Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes

This small miracle is completely overshadowed by Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, resulting in 12 baskets left over.

(Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14)

God's provision for us is not only enough, but it overflows and exceeds what we need..

barley-loaves - poor bread, used for the first fruit offering and symbolic of the Resurrection.

fish - small fish, like sardines, salted and usually eaten with bread

The bread and fish were brought to Jesus, who "looking toward heaven" blessed it.

He blessed it, or gave thanks: 'Blessed art Thou, Jehovah our God, King of the universe, Who causes to come forth bread from the earth.'

Once again, this was a series of small miracles. As the disciples handed out the bread and fish, the baskets would be refilled over and over.

This happened 5,000 times for the men, plus an unknown number for the additional women and children.

The miracle provided that there would be an excess - more than was needed. These were gathered and filled 12 baskets - one for each of the disciples distributing it.

The miracle - like many in the scriptures - was to be a test for the people.

John 6:26-27 - "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed."

i.e. the meal that was provided was not the point. It was that this is the Creator's world and He has authority over all natural laws. The miracle should point us to Him in thanksgiving. Instead, Jesus says, it was only pointing to their full stomachs.

Then they prove Jesus' point by asking for another miracle as a sign that His words are believable.

John 6:31-32 - "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven."

John 6:35 - "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

Summary - Miracles transform the natural so we can recognize the spiritual. When a miracle or an answered prayer occurs in your life, look past the physical outcome to see the Lord more clearly. If some aspect of your physical life is transformed - a healing, or a new job for instance - look through them to appreciate the spiritual healing, and the meaning God bestows on your life - and be thankful. For with God, "My cup runneth over." (Psalm 23)