

## Lesson 10     6 October 2013

### Miracles of Elisha

**Lesson Scope:** [2 Kings 4](#)

#### Lesson Focus

Elisha's ministry spanned approximately fifty years, affecting four kings of Israel and two Syrian kings. Elisha replaced Elijah as head of the prophets following Elijah's translation from this life. In this position He instructed several schools of the prophets.

Elisha requested a double portion of Elijah's spirit at his translation, and this seems to have been granted—the Scriptures record twice as many miracles for Elisha as for Elijah. Elisha's name means "God is salvation." His miracles were consistent with this name. This lesson shows him helping first a poor widow and then a woman of substantial means. God provided for the needs of the faithful through Elisha's compassionate ministry during a time of rapid spiritual decline in the nation of Israel.

The time of Elisha's ministry was a time of wholesale apostasy in Israel. In the midst of this climate, a remnant was serving the Lord faithfully. Elisha's ministry was largely one of quiet encouragement to this faithful remnant. Elisha's gentle shepherding contrasts with Elijah's bold confrontational manner of declaring God's judgment on sin. Draw out of this lesson parallels to encourage the faithful saints in our day of apostasy. The Lord will always raise up godly leaders for families that are faithfully serving Him. These are heartwarming stories of the daily trials and victories of Old Testament saints. It is of interest to note the founding of the various schools of the prophets in this time by those who had a vision for the spiritual welfare of the next generation. There may be similarities here to the introduction of Sunday school into the Mennonite Church at the beginning of the twentieth

Today God's people face many tests and experiences similar to those of the Old Testament saints. Their examples of daily reliance on God should strengthen our faith.

**Lesson Aim:** To learn practical lessons of faith from saints of the past.

**Theme Verse:** [Philippians 4:19](#). But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

## Lesson Text

### Oil From the Pot

[2 Kings 4:1-7](#) <sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, *even* empty vessels; borrow not a few. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured out. <sup>6</sup> And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, *There is* not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. <sup>7</sup> Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

### Life From the Dead

[2 Kings 4:8](#) <sup>8</sup> 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.

[2 Kings 4:13](#) <sup>13</sup> 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.

[2 Kings 4:16-20](#) <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. <sup>18</sup> And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. <sup>19</sup> And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. <sup>20</sup> And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died.

1 Kings 4:23 <sup>23</sup> Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl.

2 Kings 4:27 <sup>27</sup> 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.

2 Kings 4:32-33 <sup>32</sup> And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, *and* laid upon his bed. <sup>33</sup> He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.

2 Kings 4:36 <sup>36</sup> 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.

### **Food for the Hungry**

2 Kings 4:38-43 <sup>38</sup> 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 see the pottage for the sons of the prophets. <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O *thou* man of God, *there is* death in the pot. And they could not eat *thereof*. <sup>41</sup> But he 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. <sup>42</sup> And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. <sup>43</sup> 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*.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Oil From the Pot**

1. How did Elisha's direction test this woman's faith in God?
2. What lessons regarding debt can be drawn from this passage?
3. What are some instances when "shutting the door" is an integral part of finding God's blessing?

#### **Life From the Dead**

4. What godly virtues made this woman "great"? How was this virtue rewarded?
  5. What principles for relating to grief can we learn from this woman?
- Food for the Hungry**
6. What are some indications that the man from Baal-shalisha was a poor man but rich in faith?
  7. What are some present-day "poisonous gourds" that could contaminate our teaching and preaching?
  8. Give some examples of how God multiplies our seemingly insignificant contribution to abundantly provide for our need.

### **Analyzing the Passage**

Jewish tradition holds that this widow (2 Kings 4:1) was the wife of Obadiah, who hid the Lord's prophets in a cave and fed them in the time of Ahab. Perhaps the debt was acquired in the support of these prophets.

Sons of the prophets (2 Kings 4:1, 38) refers to one of several schools apparently under Elisha's administration. The locations mentioned in the Scriptures include Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal. These schools were the vision of the spiritual remnant of Israel in a time of spiritual apostasy. They most likely studied the Mosaic Law and sacred history.

It was not uncommon for creditors to demand payment in the form of human servitude (2 Kings 4:1). The Mosaic Law allowed for bond service until either the debt was paid or the year of Jubilee released the debt (Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:39-40).

The oil in the house was most likely olive oil (2 Kings 4:7). This was an essential commodity used for lighting, cooking, and anointing.

This faithful man found a way to support the Lord's work with his tithe in hard times (2 Kings 4:42). He gave his tithe to the school of the prophets instead of to the priests, since true worship had been abandoned in the Northern Kingdom in this apostate time.

### **Principles and Applications**

#### **Oil From the Pot**

1. The faithful often experience severe testing (2 Kings 4:1). Severe tests remind us that our strength and resources are limited. Sometimes the trials we face come from mistakes we or others have made. This widow was faced with a debt her husband had incurred. Perhaps this happened because of his involvement in the Lord's work. Nevertheless it was a decision that brought hardship to his family. A humble acknowledgment of our situation

and a willingness to accept help from God's people will access the mercy and grace of God on our behalf. This testing will strengthen our faith as we experience God's love expressed through the brotherhood. God may not remove the trial, but He will provide a way through the difficulty.

2. God's answers to our needs are directly tied to our exercise of faith in Him (2 Kings 4:3). This woman's deceased husband was known as a man who feared the Lord. It was further evident that this widow possessed the same faith. She followed God's direction through Elisha one step at a time. God's direction may also be found for us in the daily worship of the family behind the shut doors of home life. The multiplying of the oil was directly tied to the number of vessels this widow and her sons had gathered from the neighbors. If you were gathering vessels at God's command, how large would your faith declare God to be?

### **Life From the Dead**

3. Faith in God is expressed as selfless love shown to God's people (2 Kings 4:8, 13). Faith is part of the fruit of the Spirit listed along with love in Galatians 5:22-23. A heart filled with agape love will see many opportunities to quietly assist in the Lord's work by lightening the load of the Lord's servants. We do not do this for reward or credit, but because we realize the great debt of love we owe to the Lord. When we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants fulfilling our duty (Luke 17:10). This kind of faith expressed in daily living brings fulfillment and contentment.

4. The faithful keep on trusting God in the midst of distressing and confusing circumstances (2 Kings 4:20, 23, 27). The Lord may suddenly remove a loved one from our lives through death. We might be diagnosed with a terminal illness. Perhaps we experience a huge financial loss that threatens to overwhelm us. Can we believe that God is still on the throne and is planning each detail for our eternal good? Can we submissively say, "It is well"? A response of faith will turn these experiences into milestones of spiritual progress when we adjust our priorities to match the God-ordained circumstances.

5. Personal persistence in prayer to God will be rewarded with the right answer at the right time (2 Kings 4:33, 36). Times of extremity should drive us to our knees in our "secret closet." With all distractions shut out, we can pour out our heart in pathos to the listening ear of our heavenly Father. God is not limited to our finite perspective of the current circumstances. Because of our human blindness, we may at times ask for things that would be spiritually detrimental. At these times, God will answer with more than we ask by giving us what we need most, instead of what we ask. We need

to trust God regarding how and when He answers.

### **Food for the Hungry**

6. Divine power meets every need when we obey the Word of the Lord without question (2 Kings 4:41). We constantly need to be alert to the deadly "gourds" that may threaten our lives or the lives of our family. Be it a physical or a spiritual threat, God gives specific direction in the form of spiritual meal that will render harmless the potency of evil. The false teachings of Calvinism and the seeds of pietism mixed with the Gospel message will have spiritually deadly results. Allowing sins of the spirit like bitterness in our hearts is another example of a poison that will bring disastrous results. We need to apply God's grace and direction to our lives daily for His Word to be effective in us.

7. God rewards faith that moves ahead at His command even when circumstances appear impossible (2 Kings 4:43). God is able to multiply our feeble resources if we are willing to express faith by giving them in obedience to Him. He will never require more of us than He will give grace to accomplish. The Bible is full of instances when faith was rewarded in this way—the parting of the Jordan River, Daniel facing the lions, the feeding of the five thousand, and so forth. With God's blessing on our scanty resources, we will have our needs met and some to spare.

### **Important Teachings**

1. The faithful often experience severe testing (4:1).
2. God's answers to our needs are directly tied to our exercise of faith in Him (4:3).
3. Faith in God is expressed as selfless love shown to God's people (4:8, 13).
4. The faithful keep on trusting God in the midst of distressing and confusing circumstances (4:20, 23, 27).
5. Personal persistence in prayer to God will be rewarded with the right answer at the right time (4:33, 36).
6. Divine power meets every need when we obey the Word of the Lord without question (4:41).
7. God rewards faith that moves ahead at His command even when circumstances appear impossible (4:43).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. How did Elisha's direction test this woman's faith in God?  
Elisha did not tell her the outcome or the plan. He simply asked what she

had in the house and told her to borrow as many vessels as she could without her knowing why.

2. What lessons regarding debt can be drawn from this passage?

God expects debts to be paid. Care should be used in taking on debt, lest those after us suffer for what we incur. God will make a way for debts to be paid for those who are diligently seeking a solution, especially if the debt is honestly incurred because of legitimate needs.

3. What are some instances when "shutting the door" is an integral part of finding God's blessing?

Any time of worship, especially our personal devotional time, requires the shutting out of distractions. This is especially true when we are seeking God's direction in a time of crisis.

4. What godly virtues made this woman "great"? How was this virtue rewarded?

This woman's greatness lay in her notable spiritual qualities. She was observant of the needs of God's prophet and showed love in her hospitality to refresh him. She was perceptive of the qualities of holiness in Elisha. She expressed contentment when Elisha desired to show his gratitude with a gift. This home was one where children were welcome. We see motherly compassion and care as she held her sick son. She showed spiritual fortitude by her submission in adverse circumstances.

She was rewarded with a son in her older years. She was rewarded again for her faith when her son was raised from the dead. She found direction for her life from God through Elisha many times. (See 2 Kings 8:1-6 for more details regarding this woman.)

5. What principles for relating to grief can we learn from this woman?

She controlled her emotions. This enabled her to think rationally in the stressful situation. She accepted the facts she did not understand as God's sovereign will for her life. ("It is well.") She sought comfort and direction from God's people (Elisha as a godly leader).

6. What are some indications that the man from Baal-shalisha was a poor man but rich in faith?

Barley loaves were the food of the poor people. In this time of apostasy, the children of Israel were forbidden to travel to Jerusalem to bring their tithes and offerings to the temple. This man found a way to use his tithe in support of the Lord's work anyway; he gave it to support this school of the prophets. Even though his gift was small and he was poor, he tithed as an expression of his faith in God and of his willingness to obey.

7. What are some present-day "poisonous gourds" that could contaminate

our teaching and preaching?

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15). The false teachings of Calvinism and the seeds of pietistic thinking are very prevalent in our day. Any teaching that promises salvation and eternal life without a life of surrender and cross bearing is poisonous.

8. Give some examples of how God multiplies our seemingly insignificant contribution to abundantly provide for our need.

God blessed the revival movements of the 1960s, not only to regain lost ground but also to gain new spiritual heights beyond anyone's expectations. God has abundantly met the needs of the brotherhood by the mutual sharing of brotherhood assistance, far beyond the expectations of those who by faith abandoned insurance programs.

God has not only richly blessed the Christian day school movement but has also enabled the church to provide a comprehensive Christian curriculum. God has provided for His people through difficult financial times and has enabled them to help others in need.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

God's people respond in faith to life's varying circumstances. God will always reward this kind of response with grace enough and to spare. May our hearts echo the plea of the disciples: "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5).

### **Research Guide**

1. Read A Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles for an interesting chronology of Elisha's life in the kingdom of Israel.
2. Read the entry under "Elisha" in a Bible dictionary or the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. See also Bible History by Alfred Edersheim.