



# THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

## LESSON 6: JEHOVAH PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE (2KINGS 4,8)

So far in our study we have noted God's provision for His faithful servants Elijah and Elisha. The Lord not only provided necessities like food (1Kings 17.3-6), but also with purpose (1Kings 19.15-18) and the means to accomplish His work (2Kings 2.15ff.). And ultimately, the Lord provided a reward for their faithfulness (2Kings 2.11). However, Elijah and Elisha were not the only Israelites who remained faithful to Jehovah. Remember, the Lord declared there were "7,000 in Israel... that have not bowed to Baal" (1Kings 19.18), and He was providing for them as well.

2Kings 4 & 8 consist of several accounts where we see God providing for His people. Significantly, some of these episodes occurred during times of famine (see 4.38; 8.1), a time when Israel was being punished for her unfaithfulness to the Lord (see Deuteronomy 28.23-24). The Lord always knows those who belong to Him, and He always cares for them!

### NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

#### **The widow's oil (4.1-7)**

- Vs. 1
  - » "Because of the fragile nature of the environment in much of the ancient Near East, farmers and small landowners often found themselves in debt. Their problems could magnify if a drought and resulting poor harvests continued over more than one year, and they could be forced to sell their land, goods and eventually even their family and themselves into debt slavery. Israelite law takes this situation into account by providing a fair period of labor service to the creditor as well as a time limit on servitude for the debt slave. No one could serve more than six years, and when slaves were freed they went out debt-free. This would have been a good solution for some, but without their land to return to, many may have chosen to remain in the service of their creditor or to move to the cities to find jobs or to join the military." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
  - » The Law regulated the length of time a Hebrew could serve as a slave and their treatment (Exodus 21.2-3; Leviticus 25.39). Unsurprisingly, Israel violated God's law in this matter (see Amos 2.6; 8.6).
  - » According to Josephus and the Targums, this widow was the wife of Ahab's servant Obadiah (see 1Kings 18.3-4). "The cause of the debt is that Obadiah borrowed money for the maintenance of the prophets while in hiding. After he died his widow and her children are in danger of being carried off into slavery." (NIV Application Commentary)
  - » The Law prescribed that an Israelite could redeem his kinsman out of servitude (see Leviticus 25.47-55). It would seem that this widow was asking Elisha to provide this service for his fellow prophet.

- Vs. 7, this story confirms that God does not fail the widow and the fatherless (see Deuteronomy 10.18).

### Death in the pot (4.38-41)

- Vs. 38, this Gilgal would be the same one referenced in 2Kings 2.1, not the one near Jericho (see Joshua 4.19)
- Vs. 39, "The poisonous ingredient is generally considered the yellow gourds known as colocynths, popularly referred to today as apples of Sodom. They can be fatal." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 41, for God's faithful, the harmful has become innocuous. See Luke 10.19.



### Feeding the 100 (4.42-44)

- Vs. 42
  - » Baal Shalishah was located in the Sharon plain, north of Lydda.
  - » The first fruits were to be given to the priest (Leviticus 23.10), so the fact that they were given to Elisha in this account not only reflects his role as God's representative, but likely reflects the status of the priesthood during this time.
- Vss. 43-44, note the similarities between this miracle and the Lord feeding the 5000 (Matthew 14.13-21) and the 4000 (Matthew 15.32-38).

### The Shunammite woman (4.8-37; 8.1-6)

- 4.8, "Shunem (modern Solem) lay about eleven kilometres south of Mount Tabor, eight kilometres from Jezreel and thirty-two kilometres from Carmel (cf. v. 25), and so near a route likely to have been used frequently." (Tyndale)
- 4.13, Elisha's offer may indicate that he had gained political influence, possibly as a result of his involvement during the Moabite campaign (see 2Kings 3).
- 4.14, a son would be needed to maintain the family property.
- 4.21, the woman's actions may reflect faith that Elisha would be able to restore her son.
- 4.23, new moons, as well as Sabbaths, were times when all work ceased (see Amos 8.5; cf. Numbers 28.11-15), thus providing opportunity to consult God's prophets.
- 4.25, the distance from Shunem to Mount Carmel was ~20 miles.
- 4.28, compare with the woman at Zarephath (1Kings 17.18).
- 4.29, perhaps it was hoped that the staff of Elisha could effect a miracle, similar to Moses' staff (Exodus 4.1-4; 17.5-6) or this was done in the assurance that Elisha was

coming.

- 4.35, I don't necessarily subscribe to this thinking, but it is of interest: "In Mesopotamian incantation literature the touching of part to part is a means by which demons exercise power over their intended victims—it is the idiom of possession. In this belief, vitality or life force can be transferred from one body to the other by contact of each part. By imitating the procedure believed to be used by demons, the prophet is able, through the power of Yahweh (notice the prayer), to drive the demons out and restore the boy's life." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 8.1, we cannot know exactly when this famine occurred and if it was in relation to the famines mentioned in 4.38; 6.24-7.20. Famines served as punishment for unfaithfulness and as calls to repentance (1Kings 17.1; Haggai 1.6-11).
- 8.2, "Though Samaria typically experiences slightly more rainfall per year than the southern coastal plain (land of the Philistines), the alluvial flood plain of the coast is less dependent on the rainfall and would be the logical area to try to weather a famine." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 8.3, it is possible that the king or a member of his family had taken possession of her home, but regardless it was the king's responsibility to maintain justice, thus she makes her appeal to him.
- 8.4, "The king (v. 4) is not named, and since Gehazi is in the royal presence it may be assumed that this was before his dismissal as Elisha's servant (5:27). If so, the king might be Jehu, for J(eh)oram knew Elisha well (3:13)." (Tyndale)

## TAKEAWAYS:

The story of the Shunammite woman and her son (4.8-37) makes the point of the Lord giving (vs. 16), the Lord taking away (vss. 18-20), but then the Lord giving again (vss. 32-37). We might argue that responsibility for the boys' death should not be laid at the Lord's feet, but it would seem that the woman believed this (vs. 28) and this would be in keeping with the Jews' understanding of death. So Job declared that what the Lord gives, He takes away (Job 1.21) and the Psalmist's declaration that it is the Lord who "take away their spirit, they expire and return to the dust" (Psalm 104.30). Regardless of our understanding of the Lord's role in the death of men, the point of this account is that the Lord provides even in death... He provides life again. And this provision is the hope we cherish (1Corinthians 15.20ff).

These episodes also reflect the Lord's ability to abundantly provide for His faithful ones. The widow is not only blessed with enough oil to pay her debt, but enough to provide a living for her and her sons (4.7). Likewise, the 20 loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain are enough to feed 100 with some being left over (4.42-44). These episodes foreshadow some of the same works of Jesus while on this earth, namely feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14.13-21) and of the 4000 (Matthew 15.32-38). These signs showing His ability to provide abundance serve as proof of His claim that "I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10.10). In Him, we continue to experience His abundant provision as we are blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1.3).