

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 2 KINGS 4

THIS CHAPTER WILL HIGHLIGHT ELISHA THE PROPHET. 2 KINGS HAS INTRODUCED US TO ELISHA AS ELIJAH'S SUCCESSOR AND WE WILL NOW READ STORIES OF HIS MINISTRY.

2 KINGS 4:1-7 - OIL FOR THE WIDOW

THIS WOMAN IS A WIDOW OF ONE OF THE "SONS OF THE PROPHETS (V. 1)", THAT GROUP OF UNNAMED PROPHETS APPARENTLY DWELLING AND WORKING TOGETHER DURING THE TIME OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA. NOT ONLY IS SHE A WIDOW, BUT SHE IS SEVERE FINANCIAL TROUBLE (WE DON'T KNOW THE SPECIFICS AS TO WHY), FEARING HER CHILDREN TO BE TAKEN AS SLAVES.

AT THE WORD OF ELISHA, HER NEEDS ARE TAKEN CARE OF THROUGH A MIRACULOUS MULTIPLICATION OF OIL, A COSTLY AND IMPORTANT RESOURCE OF THE DAY.

2 KINGS 4:8-17 - ELISHA & THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

V 8-11 - ELISHA FINDS A GENEROUS PATRON IN A NAMELESS WOMEN FROM THE VILLAGE OF SHUNEM. SHE AND HER HUSBAND PROVIDE FOOD AND A GUEST ROOM IN THEIR HOME FOR ELISHA TO USE.

V. 12-14 - ELISHA CALLS FOR THE WOMAN AND ASKS HER WHAT CAN DO FOR HER AS A GRATEFUL GESTURE FOR HER GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY. HE OFFERS TO SPEAK TO AN AUTHORITY FIGURE ON HER BEHALF. HOWEVER, THE WOMAN IS NOT LOOKING FOR A POLITICAL OR MATERIAL FAVOR. INSTEAD SHE MENTIONS HER LACK OF A SON, EVEN NOW AT HER (AND HER HUSBAND'S) OLD AGE.

HOW IT MUST HAVE TOUCHED HER HEART AND RAISED HER HOPES WHEN ELISHA MADE SUCH A GESTURE AND PROCLAMATION. HOWEVER, CLEARLY HER HEART WAS TENDER AND SHE DID NOT WANT TO HAVE FALSE HOPE. SURE ENOUGH ELISHA'S WORD CAME TO PAST (V. 17).

TO HAVE A SON IN ANY SEASON WAS A BLESSING. A SON SYMBOLIZED THE BLESSING OF THE LORD TOWARDS THE CONTINUANCE OF THE FAMILY NAME AND GAVE HOPE THAT THERE WOULD BE SOMEONE TO CARE FOR ANY FAMILY BUSINESS OR PROPERTY. TO BE WITHOUT A SON WAS TROUBLING FOR A FAMILY. BOTH IN LIGHT OF FAMILY HONOR, IN A CULTURE THAT HIGHLY ESTEEMED SUCH THINGS AND IN LIGHT OF THE FINANCIAL FUTURE OF THE FAMILY. IN LIGHT OF THIS, TO HAVE A SON IN YOUR OLD AGE AFTER BEING WITHOUT A SON WAS A SPECIAL CASE(CP. SARAH & ELIZABETH FOR EXAMPLE) FOR IT BROUGHT BLESSING AND HONOR IN A TIME WHEN THE FAMILY LIKELY ASSUMED THIS WOULD NOT OCCUR FOR THEM.

2 KINGS 4:18-25 - THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN'S SON DIES

CAN YOU IMAGINE THE REVERSAL OF EMOTION THAT THIS INCIDENT BROUGHT? THE SON OF YOUR OLD AGE, BORN OUT OF THE BLESSING OF THE LORD SUDDENLY GETS SICK AND DIES? ONE CAN IMAGINE THE CARE AND LOVE THIS CHILD MUST HAVE RECEIVED FROM HIS PARENTS AS A RESULT OF THEIR GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR HIS LIFE. AND NOW THAT BLESSING HAS BEEN RIPPED FROM THEIR HANDS. AND NOT IN WAR OR BECAUSE OF A PLAGUE, BUT AS A RESULT OF A SUDDEN AND STRANGE PHYSICAL ISSUE (V. 19)

2 KINGS 4:26-31 - ELISHA LEARNS OF THE TRAGEDY

V. 26 - "IT IS WELL" - IT SEEMS LIKE THE WOMAN ONLY WANTED TO DISCUSS THIS SITUATION WITH ELISHA HIMSELF. PERHAPS SHE FEARED THAT IF SHE GAVE THE DETAILS TO HIS SERVANT, ELISHA WOULD HAVE THE CHANCE TO AVOID HER OR DECLINE TO COME TO OVERSEE SUCH A SEEMINGLY IRREVERSIBLE SITUATION.

V. 27-28 - THE TEXT NEVER INDICATES THAT THE WOMAN TELLS ELISHA WHAT HAD HAPPENED. PERHAPS SHE DID AND IT IS UNRECORDED, OR IT IS POSSIBLE THAT ELISHA IS ABLE TO DISCERN FROM THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN'S GRIEF AND CRY. IT APPEARS THAT HER WORST FEARS HAVE BEEN REALIZED ("DID I NOT SAY, "DO NOT DECEIVE ME?").

V. 29-31 - ELISHA SENDS HIS SERVANT GEHAZI AHEAD OF HIM WITH STRICT ORDERS AND HIS OWN STAFF. THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME ANTICIPATION THAT SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN AS A RESULT. HOWEVER, NOTHING HAPPENS. ELISHA HIMSELF IS TRAVELING BEHIND GEHAZI, ALONG WITH THE WIDOW WHO HAS REFUSED TO LEAVE HIS SIDE (V. 30).

SOME OF US KNOW THE OUTCOME OF THIS STORY, OTHERS ARE ABOUT TO FIND OUT. HOWEVER, LET'S PAUSE FOR A MOMENT AND CONSIDER THE REAL TIME UNFOLDING OF ALL OF THIS. THE MOTHER FINDS ELISHA AND HE DIRECTS HIS SERVANT TO COME AND LAY HIS STAFF OVER HER DEAD SON'S FACE. WHAT DO YOU THINK SHE IS THINKING AS THEY WALK FROM MOUNT CARMEL BACK TO SHUNEM? AND WHEN THEY WALK INTO HER HOME WITH ELISHA'S OWN STAFF, A SYMBOL OF HIS PROPHETIC MINISTRY AND POWER, WHAT IS GOING THROUGH HER MIND? AND THEN WHEN GEHAZI LAYS THE STAFF ON THE BOY'S FACE AS INSTRUCTED BY GREAT ELISHA AND NOTHING HAPPENS - WHAT DO YOU DO THEN?!

THAT'S A REAL POSSIBILITY IN OUR WALK OF FAITH. WE GO THROUGH SEASONS WHERE WE CRY OUT TO THE LORD AND IT SEEMS LIKE THINGS DON'T CHANGE, THEN WE GET OUR HOPES UP BECAUSE SOMETHING LOOKS AS IF IT IS CHANGING...AND THEN WE'RE DISAPPOINTED AGAIN BECAUSE IT DIDN'T WORK OUT AFTER ALL. THESE MOMENTS ARE OFTEN THE CROSSROADS THAT MANY PEOPLE ARRIVE AT. IN THESE MOMENTS WE ARE FACED WITH THE CHOICE TO KEEP TRUSTING, OR NOT...KEEP WAITING, OR NOT...KEEP PRAYING, OR NOT.

BUT WHAT WE WILL LEARN IN THE NEXT VERSES, THOUGH NOTHING HAD CHANGED FOR THE BETTER FOR THE WOMAN'S HEART (AND CERTAINLY FOR HER SON), ALL OF THE OPTIONS FOR GOD TO WORK HAD NOT YET BEEN EXHAUSTED. THERE WAS STILL MORE THAT COULD BE DONE. AND SO WE ARE REMINDED THAT THE CHOICE TO KEEP TRUSTING, WAITING AND PRAYING IS THE HARD BUT RIGHT CHOICE TO MAKE.

ONE OTHER, SOMEWHAT UNRELATED OBSERVATION ON THIS POINT, I APPRECIATE THAT THE WOMAN NEVER SAYS "ELISHA, AFTER EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE DONE FOR YOU, ALL THAT I HAVE GIVEN TO YOU, HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?!" IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE SHE HAD BEEN HONORING ELISHA, AND THUS THE LORD JUST TO GET SOMETHING OUT OF IT, INCLUDING SOME FALSE PROMISE OF A TROUBLE FREE LIFE.

2 KINGS 4:32-37 - THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON IS REVIVED

2 KINGS 4:38-41 - CHEF ELISHA SAVES THE DAY

2 KINGS 4:38-41 (NLT) - ELISHA NOW RETURNED TO GILGAL, AND THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND. ONE DAY AS THE GROUP OF PROPHETS WAS SEATED BEFORE HIM, HE SAID TO HIS SERVANT, "PUT A LARGE POT ON THE FIRE, AND MAKE SOME STEW FOR THE REST OF THE GROUP." 39 ONE OF THE YOUNG MEN WENT OUT INTO THE FIELD TO GATHER HERBS AND CAME BACK WITH A POCKETFUL OF WILD GOURDS. HE SHREDDED THEM AND PUT THEM INTO THE POT WITHOUT REALIZING THEY WERE POISONOUS. 40 SOME OF THE STEW WAS SERVED TO THE MEN. BUT AFTER THEY HAD EATEN A BITE OR TWO THEY CRIED OUT, "MAN OF GOD, THERE'S POISON IN THIS STEW!" SO

THEY WOULD NOT EAT IT. 41 ELISHA SAID, "BRING ME SOME FLOUR." THEN HE THREW IT INTO THE POT AND SAID, "NOW IT'S ALL RIGHT; GO AHEAD AND EAT." AND THEN IT DID NOT HARM THEM.

THIS BRIEF BUT MIRACULOUS RECORD REMINDS US THAT GOD CARES ABOUT THE LITTLE THINGS TOO. A CHILD IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION AND NOW AN INNOCENT MISTAKE INVOLVING SOME BAD GOURDS IS ALSO RESOLVED BY THE POWER OF GOD. LIFE IS SPIRITUAL.

2 KINGS 4:42-44 - BREAD FOR 100 MEN

I HOPE THAT YOU SEE FORESHADOWS OF JESUS AS YOU READ THIS FINAL STORY. THE LORD MULTIPLIES THE BREAD FOR 100 MEN THROUGH THE WORD OF ELISHA. THIS FINAL MIRACLE OF ELISHA RECONFIRMS THE FIRST MIRACLE WE READ ABOUT IN VS 1-7. THE GOD OF ELISHA IS A PROVIDING GOD. HE IS A GENEROUS GOD.

THE STORIES HIGHLIGHT ELISHA'S POWER AND MINISTRY, BUT EVEN MORE SO THEY SHOULD HIGHLIGHT THE GOD OF ELISHA. IN CONTRAST TO BAAL WHO IS FICKLE AND STINGY AND UNPREDICTABLE, YAHWEH GIVES, HEALS, RESTORES AND PROVIDES. THE MAN OF GOD IS NOT THE FOCUS, GOD IS THE FOCUS. THE STAR OF THE SHOW IS THE LORD. AND THE LORD HAS A CHOSEN VESSEL IN ELISHA - THAT'S WHAT CHAPTER 4 IS CONFIRMING TO US.

WE'VE BEEN AWAY FROM THE BIGGER STORY FOR A BIT, BUT WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THINGS IN ISRAEL ARE STILL NOT GOOD. IDOLATRY AND WICKEDNESS ARE STILL RULING (CASE AND POINT: JEZEBEL IS STILL QUEEN). AND THE MAIN HERO OF OUR STORY, THE PROPHET ELIJAH, THE ONE MAN WHO VICTORIOUSLY COMBATED THIS EVIL, IS GONE. AND SO GOD PAUSES OUR BIGGER STORY FOR A MINUTE TO HIGHLIGHT ELISHA AND ALL OF THE THINGS GOD HAD AND COULD DO THROUGH HIM. THE STORIES ARE INSPIRING AND POWERFUL, BUT THERE IS A BIGGER POINT FOR US TO GLEAN FROM THESE MIRACLES - THE POINT OF THE STORY IS THAT THROUGH ELISHA, WHOSE VERY NAME MEANS "GOD IS SALVATION", GOD IS STILL WORKING, AND THINGS IN THE END ARE GOING TO BE ALRIGHT. IT'S GOOD TO HAVE THAT REMINDER FROM TIME TO TIME.