SECOND KINGS

Chapter 4

***The Widow’s Oil***

**The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.” 2 Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?” “Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a little oil.” 3 Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.” 5 She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. 6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing. 7 She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”**

**4:1** *company of the prophets.* See notes on 2:3; 1Ki 20:35. *to take my two boys as his slaves.* Servitude as a means of debt payment by labor was permitted in the Mosaic law (Ex 21:1–2; Lev 25:39–41; Dt 15:1–11). It appears that the practice was much abused (see Ne 5:5, 8; Am 2:6; 8:6), even though the law limited the term of such bondage and required that those so held be treated as hired workers. (CSB)

**4:4** *shut the door behind you and your sons.* The impending miracle was not intended to be a public sensation but to demonstrate privately God’s mercy and grace to this widow (cf. Ps 68:5). She did not hesitate to respond to the instructions of the Lord’s prophet in faith and obedience. (CSB)

***The Shunammite’s Son Restored to Life***

**8 One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. 9 She said to her husband, “I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. 10 Let’s make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us.” 11 One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. 12 He said to his servant Gehazi, “Call the Shunammite.” So he called her, and she stood before him. 13 Elisha said to him, “Tell her, ‘You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?’ ” She replied, “I have a home among my own people.” 14 “What can be done for her?” Elisha asked. Gehazi said, “Well, she has no son and her husband is old.” 15 Then Elisha said, “Call her.” So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. 16 “About this time next year,” Elisha said, “you will hold a son in your arms.” “No, my lord,” she objected. “Don’t mislead your servant, O man of God!” 17 But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her. 18 The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. 19 “My head! My head!” he said to his father. His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.” 20 After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. 21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out. 22 She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.” 23 “Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.” “It’s all right,” she said. 24 She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.” 25 So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite! 26 Run to meet her and ask her, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?’ ” “Everything is all right,” she said. 27 When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why.” 28 “Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes’?” 29 Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.” 30 But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got up and followed her. 31 Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.” 32 When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. 33 He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. 34 Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm. 35 Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. 36 Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.” 37 She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.**

**4:8** *Shunem.* See note on 1Ki 1:3. (CSB)

**4:9** *holy man of God.* The woman recognized that Elisha was a person set apart to the Lord’s work in a very special sense. Nowhere else in the OT is the term “holy” applied to a prophet. (CSB)

**4:10** *he can stay there whenever he comes to us.* By her hospitality the woman was able to assist in sustaining the proclamation of God’s word through Elisha. (CSB)

**4:12** *Gehazi.* Referred to here for the first time; he appears to have served Elisha in some of the same ways as Elisha had served Elijah, though the two men were of drastically different character (see 5:19–27; 6:15). (CSB)

**4:13** *I have a home among my own people.* The Shunammite woman felt secure and content in the community of her own family and tribe, and she had no need or desire for favors from high government officials. (CSB)

**4:14** *she has no son and her husband is old.* A great disappointment because it meant that the family’s name would cease and its land and possessions would pass on to others. It was also a great threat to this young wife’s future in that she faced the likelihood of many years as a widow with no provider or protector—children were a widow’s only social security in old age (see 8:1–6; see also note on 1Ki 17:22). (CSB)

**4:16** *About this time next year.* See Ge 17:21; 18:14. (CSB)

*Don’t mislead your servant, O man of God!* The woman’s response revealed the depths of her desire for a son and her fear of disappointment more than it showed a lack of confidence in the word of Elisha. (CSB)

**4:17** *just as Elisha had told her.* The trustworthiness of Elisha’s word was confirmed, and the birth of the son was shown to be the result of God’s gracious intervention in her behalf. (CSB)

**4:20** *he died.* The child, given as an evidence of God’s grace and the reliability of his word, was suddenly taken from the woman in a severe test of her faith. Her subsequent actions demonstrate the strength of her faith in the face of great calamity. (CSB)

**4:21** *laid him on the bed of the man of God.* In this way the woman concealed the child’s death from the rest of the household while she went to seek the prophet at whose word the child had been born. (CSB)

**4:23** *Why go to him today?* The question suggests that it was not uncommon for the woman to go to Elisha, but that on this occasion the timing of her visit was unusual. (CSB)

*It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.* The Sabbath and New Moon were observed by cessation from work (see notes on Ge 2:3; Ex 16:23; 20:9–10; 1Sa 20:5; see also Lev 23:3). (CSB)

**4:26** *Everything is all right.* The woman was determined to share her distress with no one but the prophet from whom she had received the promise of the birth of her son. (CSB)

**4:28** *Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes’?* The woman struggled with the question of why the Lord would take from her that which she had been given as a special demonstration of his grace and the trustworthiness of his word. (CSB)

**4:29** *Lay my staff on the boy’s face.* It appears that Elisha expected the Lord to restore the boy’s life when the staff was placed on him. This does not suggest that Elisha attributed magical power to the staff, but that he viewed it as a representation of his own presence and a symbol of divine power (see note on 2:8; cf. Ex 14:16; Ac 19:12). (CSB)

**4:30** *I will not leave you.* The woman was not convinced that Gehazi’s mission would be successful and insisted that Elisha himself accompany her to Shunem. (CSB)

**4:33** *shut the door on the two of them and prayed.* Just as Elijah had done in a similar situation years before (see 1Ki 17:20–22), Elisha first turned to the Lord in earnest prayer for restoration of life to the dead child. His prayer is clear evidence that his subsequent actions were not intended as a magical means of restoring life. (CSB)

**4:34** *lay upon the boy.* See note on 1Ki 17:21. Perhaps Elisha was familiar with the earlier similar action of Elijah. (CSB)

**4:37** *fell at his feet and bowed to the ground.* The woman gratefully acknowledged the special favor granted to her by the Lord through Elisha, and silently reaffirmed the verbal confession of the widow of Zarephath (see 1Ki 17:24). (CSB)

***Death in the Pot***

**38 Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, “Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these men.” 39 One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine. He gathered some of its gourds and filled the fold of his cloak. When he returned, he cut them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were. 40 The stew was poured out for the men, but as they began to eat it, they cried out, “O man of God, there is death in the pot!” And they could not eat it. 41 Elisha said, “Get some flour.” He put it into the pot and said, “Serve it to the people to eat.” And there was nothing harmful in the pot.**

**4:38** *famine in that region.* Perhaps the same famine mentioned in 8:1. Famine was a covenant curse (see Lev 26:19–20, 26; Dt 28:18, 23–24; 1Ki 8:36–37) and evidence of God’s anger with his people’s disobedience to their covenant obligations. (CSB)

*company of the prophets.* See note on 2:3. (CSB)

**4:39** *wild vine … gourds.* The precise type of plant is not specified. (CSB)

**4:41** *flour.* The flour itself did not make the stew edible (see 2:21 and note). It was simply a means by which the Lord provided for those who were faithful to the covenant, at a time when others suffered under the covenant curse. (CSB)

***Feeding of a Hundred***

**42 A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. “Give it to the people to eat,” Elisha said. 43 “How can I set this before a hundred men?” his servant asked. But Elisha answered, “Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’ ” 44 Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord.**

**4:42** *first ripe grain.* Instead of bringing the firstfruits of the new harvest (see Lev 2:14; 23:15–17; Dt 18:3–5) to the apostate priests at Bethel and Dan (see 1Ki 12:28–31), godly people in the northern kingdom may have contributed their offerings for the sustenance of Elisha and those associated with him (see note on v. 23). Thus they looked upon Elisha rather than the apostate king and priests as the true representative of their covenant Lord. (CSB)

**4:43** *the Lord says.* The bread was multiplied at the word of the Lord through Elisha apart from any intermediate means (contrast v. 41; 2:20; cf. Mk 6:35–43). (CSB)