

SECOND KINGS

Chapter 4

Elisha and the Widow's Oil

Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” 2 And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?” And she said, “Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” 3 Then he said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. 4 Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.” 5 So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. 6 When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another.” Then the oil stopped flowing. 7 She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest.”

4:1–8:15 This long section about Elisha’s life follows the story of his participation in the Moabite campaign (ch 3). Apparently, the accounts are not arranged in chronological sequence. None of them is dated. The ruling monarch is not identified by name but simply called “the king of Israel” (5:5; 6:9). Elisha was active during the reign of Jehoram’s successors (13:10, 14). Chs 4–7 record eight miraculous deeds (4:1–7, 8–37, 38–41, 42–44; 5:1–14; 6:1–7, 8–23; 6:24–7:20). Ambr: “Other men for the sake of rest are wont to withdraw their minds from business, and to retire from the company and companionship of men; to seek the retirement of the country or the solitude of the fields, or in the city to give their minds a rest and to enjoy peace and quietness. But Elisha was ever active.... When can the upright man be alone, since he is always with God? When is he left forsaken who is never separated from Christ?” (NPNF 2 10:68). (TLSB)

4:1 *to take my two children to be 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)

Because the woman’s husband was dead, the creditor had the right to demand that the sons’ labor be impounded to pay the debt. (TLSB)

4:2 *jar of oil.* Olive oil. (TLSB)

4:4 *shut the door behind yourself 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)

4:7 *pay your debts.* God would have us fulfill our obligations (cf Rm 13:8). (TLSB)

4:1–7 Through Elisha, the Lord delivers a widow from poverty and her sons from slavery. The Lord cares about your finances, your freedom, and every aspect of your life. Plan well for the future, seek His guidance, and turn to Him with your requests. As the Lord blesses you, use your resources and freedom to honor His name. For His name’s sake, He adopts us as members of His household and delivers us from

evil. • Pour out for me, O Lord, the oil of gladness, that my mouth may overflow in praise to You. Amen (TLSB)

Elisha and the Shunammite Woman

8 One day Elisha went on to Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to eat some food. So whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food. **9** And she said to her husband, “Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way. **10** Let us make a small room on the roof with walls and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there.” **11** One day he came there, and he turned into the chamber and rested there. **12** And he said to Gehazi his servant, “Call this Shunammite.” When he had called her, she stood before him. **13** And he said to him, “Say now to her, ‘See, you have taken all this trouble for us; what is to be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?’” She answered, “I dwell among my own people.” **14** And he said, “What then is to be done for her?” Gehazi answered, “Well, she has no son, and her husband is old.” **15** He said, “Call her.” And when he had called her, she stood in the doorway. **16** And he said, “At this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son.” And she said, “No, my lord, O man of God; do not lie to your servant.” **17** But the woman conceived, and she bore a son about that time the following spring, as Elisha had said to her.

4:8 *Shunem*. Elisha’s second deed has two miraculous elements: the birth of a son (vv 11–17) and healing for the son (vv 32–37). (TLSB)

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 *on the roof*. Lit, “an upper room of a wall.” Apparently, she suggested that the wall of the house be raised, at least on one side, to make possible the construction of a permanent room on the flat roof. Israelite pillared houses typically had two stories. The furnishings are likewise typical. The account illustrates a wife’s household authority. (TLSB)

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 *he said to him, “Say now to her.”* Implies that Elisha used Gehazi as an intermediary, perhaps due to a difference in language or dialect. (TLSB)

on your behalf. Elisha offered to intercede on her behalf with the highest authorities, who were known to respect his counsel (cf 3:11–12). (TLSB)

I dwell 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). (CSB)

4:15 *doorway.* Such portals represented changes in life; also clarifies that the prophet had no contact with the woman who would become pregnant. (TLSB)

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

Do not lie to your servant! 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)

The woman regarded the birth of a son impossible. (TLSB)

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)

4:8–17 Through Elisha, the Lord returns a kindness shown by a couple at Shunem. Though we do not merit salvation by our good works, the Lord often provides temporal rewards to His people, acknowledging their faith and kindness. Honor the Lord in all your ways, most of all rejoicing in the gift of His Son, your Savior, who redeems you by grace alone. • Merciful Savior, reward us not as we deserve but according to Your merciful goodness, through Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

Elisha Raises the Shunammite's Son

18 When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. **19** And he said to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." **20** And when he had lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died. **21** And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door behind him and went out. **22** Then she called to her husband and said, "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again." **23** And he said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath." She said, "All is well." **24** Then she saddled the donkey, and she said to her servant, "Urge the animal on; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you." **25** So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Look, there is the Shunammite. **26** Run at once to meet her and say to her, 'Is all well with you? Is all well with your husband? Is all well with the child?'" And she answered, "All is well." **27** And when she came to the mountain to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came to push her away. But the man of God said, "Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me." **28** Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'" **29** He said to Gehazi, "Tie up your garment and take my staff in your hand and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not reply. And lay my staff on the face of the child." **30** Then the mother of the child said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So he arose and followed her. **31** Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. Therefore he returned to meet him and told him, "The child has not awakened." **32** When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. **33** So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the LORD. **34** Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. **35** Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house, and went up and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. **36** Then he summoned Gehazi and said, "Call

this Shunammite.” So he called her. And when she came to him, he said, “Pick up your son.” 37 She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground. Then she picked up her son and went out.

4:19 *my head, my head!* Perhaps he suffered sunstroke, which esp threatens children. Later emphasis on sneezing (v 35) may indicate he had a respiratory problem. (TLSB)

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)

4:22 *come back again.* She wanted to turn around and come back at once. (TLSB)

4:23 *Why will you 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)

Appointed service times. (TLSB)

All is well. Hbr “peace,” meaning to say: “Good-bye, don’t worry about the outcome.” Her hurry perplexed her husband because it was not the time of a religious festival that required the prophet’s presence at a specified time. She did not disclose the reason for the hasty journey. Later, she gave the same answer to Gehazi, not wishing to be detained by him (v 26). (CSB)

4:25 *Mount Carmel.* Point of ministry for Elijah and Elisha, c 20–25 mi NW of Shunem. (TLSB)

4:26 *all is well.* 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)

4:27 *she caught hold of his feet.* She hid her concern until she reached the one man she believed could help. (TLSB)

push her away. Gehazi seemed confused or even offended by her behavior. (TLSB)

hidden. At other times, the Lord fully informed His prophets. Cf 1Sm 3:17. (TLSB)

4:28 *Didn’t I say, do not deceive me?* 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 face of the child.* 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. (CSB)

Wielded by Gehazi, the symbol of his master’s authority was to work a miracle of healing. (TLSB)

4:30 *As the LORD lives.* Oath formula. Here she swears also by the life of the prophet to demonstrate her attachment to him, as Elisha had done with Elijah (2:2) (TLSB)

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)

4:31 *not awakened.* Gehazi spoke in a polite way, confirming the child's death. However, cf Mk 5:39. (TLSB)

4:32 He had likely set out after Gehazi, who, being younger could travel more quickly. (TLSB)

his bed. Elisha's bed (cf v 10). (TLSB)

4:33 *shut the door behind 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 on the child.* Perhaps Elisha was familiar with the earlier similar action of Elijah. (CSB)

warm. Possibly indicating a return to life. (TLSB)

4:35 *up again and walked.* Reason is unclear. He may have been simply pacing between "treatments" or warming his body, to warm the child. (TLSB)

house. Or, room. (TLSB)

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)

4:18–37 The Shunammite woman passionately seeks the Lord's help for her son by seeking out Elisha. When you seek the Lord in prayer, pour out your heart to Him. Bow before Him and make your petitions known. The Lord has made His heart known for you in the life, death, and resurrection of His only-begotten Son, our Savior. • Hear me, O Lord, when I cry to You. Answer me according to Your mercy. Amen. (TLSB)

Elisha Purifies the Deadly Stew

38 And Elisha came again to Gilgal when there was a famine in the land. And as the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, "Set on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets." **39** One of them went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine and gathered from it his lap full of wild gourds, and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were. **40** And they poured out some for the men to eat. But while they were eating of the stew, they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" And they could not eat it. **41** He said, "Then bring flour." And he threw it into the pot and said, "Pour some out for the men, that they may eat." And there was no harm in the pot. **42** A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, "Give to the men, that they may eat." **43** But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" So he repeated, "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" **44** So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

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)

Hbr “the famine,” perhaps referring to the one mentioned in 8:1. (TLSB)

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

Fruits of a cucumberlike vine thought to be the colocynth. Although used for medicinal purposes, they can prove fatal if eaten in large quantities. (TLSB)

4:40 *death.* Someone detected the poisonous substance. (TLSB)

could not eat. Prospect of losing a whole meal for a large group during extended famine was upsetting. (TLSB)

4:41 *flour.* The flour itself did not make the stew edible. 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)

Basic for making bread, the most common food of the Israelites and emblematic of life itself. Though extra flour would disperse the effects of the poison, the result here was not merely clever but miraculous. (TLSB)

4:42 *Baal-shalishah.* Perhaps the same place called Shalishah in 1Sm 9:4, located c 15 mi NW of Gilgal. (TLSB)

bringing the man of God. Recognizing in Elisha a “man of God,” a man brought him “the firstfruits,” normally given to the priests (Ex 23:19). Perhaps this indicates the weakness of the genuine priesthood in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (TLSB)

firstfruits. 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. Thus they looked upon Elisha rather than the apostate king and priests as the true representative of their covenant Lord. (CSB)

Likely heads of wheat, which could be parched or ground for flour. (TLSB)

4:43 *How can I ... hundred men?* Jesus’ disciples made similar remarks when He fed the multitudes (Mt 14:17; 15:33). (TLSB)

thus says the LORDS. 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)

4:44 *according to the word of the LORD.* God gives life according to His Word, by which this miracle was produced. (TLSB)

4:38–44 Through Elisha, the Lord miraculously provides for the sons of the prophets. Food proclaims the Lord’s providential care for His creation. Your daily bread is so much more than sustenance for your weak flesh. His Son, working wonders greater than those of Elisha, declared Himself the bread of life for

your sake and continues to sustain the faithful in His Holy Meal. • O Lord, in joy I offer to You the firstfruit of my labors, for You have labored to save me and serve me life-giving bread. Amen. (TLSB)