

2ND KINGS

Week 6, Chapters 4 and 5

We stopped our last lesson in the middle of 2nd Kings Chapter 4, with the story of the wealthy woman of Shunem having rushed to Mt. Carmel to urge Elisha to come back with her to try and revivify her dead son.

It was through Elisha that God had first worked His miracle of grace that gave this older, barren woman a son. And like Sarah, Abraham's wife, this nameless woman was reluctant to accept Elisha's promise that she would give birth; like many of us, she preferred to dismiss any such possibility because the thought of further disappointment at such a too-good-to-be-true proposition was too much to bear. But of course she did conceive and now, perhaps some 12 years later, is quite in love with this greatly valued firstborn son of hers.

Since this so-called *elem*, which is a Hebrew term that indicates about an 11 or 12 year old child, is now under the supervision of his father he is able (required actually) to be of use out in the fields. But one day the boy begins to complain of a severe headache. His father has him taken to his mother to be comforted (no doubt not suspecting anything serious), and within hours the boy is dead. The mother doesn't fall apart into tears and despair as one might expect; rather she flies into action. She immediately takes her child's lifeless body up the stairs and into Elisha's rooftop apartment and lays him on Elisha's bed. Then she tells her husband she urgently needs a donkey and an attendant, and that she is going to find the Man of God, Elisha.

Is this panic? I don't think so. Even though on one hand her actions don't seem rational because by custom she ought to be in mourning and planning for this child's required burial before the sun sets, on the other hand her mind is telling her that what seems final and inalterable is not. Her husband, knowing that he has a good wife of common sense, is confused when she wants to go find Elisha because he says that it's not Shabbat or Rosh Hodesh so why (especially at a time like this) would she want to go this prophet?

This woman has already personally experienced the power of God over life and death, by bringing forth new life from her dead womb. Why would it be so unthinkable, then, for God to work through the same Man of God he had only little more than a decade earlier used to bring

this happy oracle of a son to this woman, to now raise that same son from the dead? As she races to Mt. Carmel, Elisha sees her coming and sends his servant Geichazi to intercept her and find out if something is wrong. She has no interest in dealing with anyone but Elisha, and so brushes the servant aside and falls at the feet of the Great Prophet and asks him to come with her.

Elisha's answer is to give Geichazi his wooden staff, and to send him on this 15 or 20 mile journey to see what he can do. The woman is having none of it and Elisha relents and goes with her. But nonetheless the younger and more spry Geichazi goes ahead of his master and arrives at the deceased's bedside, whereupon he lays the staff by the boy's head. What meaning this has is unclear; but apparently there was some belief that the staff itself could be a medium of divine power since it belonged to Elisha. Not surprisingly when the boy's mother and Elisha arrived, the only report Geichazi could give is that there was no movement and no sign of life.

Let's re-read the last couple paragraphs of chapter 4.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS 4:32 – end

Often, modern Bible scholars who at some level believe this story and don't discount it as pure legend, say that what really happened was that the child was not dead but merely in a deep coma. Well, verse 32 directly confronts such a notion; the unequivocal statement is made that the child **was** dead!

But it is apparent from what ensues that both the grief-stricken mother and the Great Prophet believed that this situation could be remedied. Such is the measure of faith that we all ought to strive to acquire as followers of the God of Israel that when the utterly ridiculously impossible confronts us, we don't lose all hope but take it before God. This calls to mind Hannah's prayer in 1st Samuel 2 when she cried out:

CJB 1Sam. 2:5-6

⁵ The well-fed hire themselves for bread, while those who were hungry hunger no more. The barren woman has borne seven, while the mother of many wastes away.

⁶ "ADONAI kills and makes alive; he brings down to the grave, and he brings up.

Elisha goes into the room, and shuts himself in with the child. This miracle is not for prying eyes and not meant to be a public spectacle. Knowing that life and death is exclusively in the hands of Yehoveh, Elisha begins with prayer. And then he follows a pattern that hopes to resurrect the dead, which we saw his master Elijah do in very similar circumstances.

CJB 1Kings 17:17-22

17 A while later, the son of the woman whose house it was fell ill; his illness grew increasingly serious until his breathing stopped.

18 She said to Eliyahu, "What do you have against me, you man of God? Did you come to me just to remind me how sinful I am by killing my son?"

19 "Give me your son," he said to her. Taking him from her lap, he carried him into the room upstairs where he was staying and laid him on his own bed.

20 Then he cried out to ADONAI: "ADONAI my God! Have you brought also this misery on the widow I'm staying with by killing her son?"

21 He stretched himself out on the child three times and cried out to ADONAI: "ADONAI my God, please! Let this child's soul come back into him!"

22 ADONAI heard Eliyahu's cry, the child's soul came back into him, and he revived.

Elisha therefore lays himself on top of the boy's corpse; in fact verse 34 says that at least part of the procedure was to warm the boy's flesh. Apparently nothing happened immediately as after awhile he got up, walked around the room a bit, perhaps even going down to the main house under his rooftop apartment; but then returned to do it again.

Last week I asked the question about what we ought to do when action or decision is needed and cannot be deferred, but we have no clear direct instructions from God. How often we have all prayed to God to please give us direction. And frankly, most of the time there seems to be little more than silence. And that may be because YHWH wants us to realize that the answers to almost all of our questions have been answered before in the patterns and principles established in His written Word to us.

We have talked endlessly in Torah Class about God-patterns; about how the Lord establishes patterns for His universe to operate and even about how HE operates within identifiable patterns. And since the Bible is His Word to us, His followers, and since we can begin to see these patterns exposed and come alive when we read His Word, then it is only logical that we

should learn them and rely upon them in faith. It is not necessary that we have a direct personal oracle from God whenever a new challenge or a choice arrives; rather we ought to pray and then act in accordance with the repeating God-patterns and principles that we have learned. That, I'm confident, is what Elisha did. There is no hint in these passages that beyond his prayer as an appropriate and necessary form of uni-directional plea, petition, and worship towards God did God in-turn reply towards Elisha with a divine oracle of instruction.

But we must also recognize that God's patterns must be employed not only in faith but in context. And the context in the miracle of the boy's resurrection from the dead is that it was accomplished through the office of an exceedingly rare and great prophet. Elijah did it, and his replacement whom *Eliyahu* personally commissioned now is able to do it, and naturally he does it in the same pattern as Elijah. Could Geichazi have achieved the same result? How about the child's pious and fully faithful mother? The answer is "no" in both cases, because despite their other merits they are not these exceptional and great prophets.

Our English Bibles say that the boy's flesh began to warm up from its stone-cold condition, and then he sneezed 7 times. The sneezing of course is indicating that the breath of life has once again entered the boy's lungs. But why 7 times? First the number 7 is the ideal and divine number that let's us know that what is happening is a work of God and divinely ordained. But second, the Rabbis are clear that it was NOT that the boy sneezed 7 times, it's that Elisha performed this pattern of lying face to face upon the boy, and then getting up and walking around a bit, 7 times. It's what scholars call verb confusion; the idea is that the 7 times is incorrectly grammatically linked to the sneezing instead of to what it was that Elisha was doing. And it makes much more sense that way.

The story ends abruptly with Elisha telling his servant to call for the mother to come and pick up her revived son. Most appropriately, she fell to the floor before Elisha, prostrating herself in the awe of such a miracle of grace and mercy, grabbed her son and exited the apartment.

Verse 38 begins yet another story of miracles brought about through Elisha. This time he provides food for a group of disciples who are hungry. It takes place at Gilgal, although this is a different one than the one that is near Bethel. This Gilgal is to the north and more near Mt. Ebal. The situation is that there was a famine in the area and the guild prophets who looked to him as their ultimate leader were in a particularly dire situation. These folks normally lived in the most humble of circumstances and lived a life of modesty or borderline poverty. They needed to eat and so put on a large soup kettle from which this group of prophets ate communally; however it was mostly just water because there were no vegetables to add to it because of the famine. So some of the prophets went out foraging for wild plants that, despite a bad taste, at least offered some nutrition to stave off starvation. They found something that looked like a gourd or a melon and brought it back, cut it up and threw it in the soup pot.

After it was cooked for awhile it was ladled into bowls and as they began to partake one of the young prophets exclaimed that there was death in the pot. That merely means that the concoction turned out to be poisonous because the gourd was toxic. Elisha's solution was to add flour to the mix that somehow acted as an antidote and made the soup edible. What ought to astonish us more than the miracle of God making the poisonous soup benign, is that the many prophets present had such faith in the Lord working through Elisha that they believed him and ate it!

Then we immediately get a second story about food. It scarcely need be said that in the Bible, food is an important issue (in our time, even a controversial issue). In modern times it is a proverb that we are what we eat; and while we shouldn't carry that glib saying quite as far as some might, indeed we are finding that despite our highly advanced pharmaceuticals, the simple act of choosing the right foods to eat and at the same time avoiding others have an enormous effect not only on our daily well being but also on healing our bodies and even in our mental outlook. Thus I encourage us all to look beyond the simple issue of the needed calories, vitamins, protein and anti-oxidants, etc., and grasp that we can **choose** to view food no differently than the heathens do (as merely a source to satisfy our hunger), or we can view it from the Biblical perspective that food has an unseen spiritual quality to it as well. That is, the same Lord who created these bodies that burn food for fuel in order for us to physically survive, has also ordained that for those who recognize just who He is and who love Him, we are to accept the Lord's definition of what food for humans is and is not. That is essentially what the Biblical dietary laws of Leviticus accomplish. They add the spiritual quality to food by telling us what the Father has set aside for us as food, and what He has separated away FROM us as not food, even though from a purely medical and physical perspective the prohibited items are usually edible and digestible and provide energy to power these bodies.

I believe that just as with Elisha and the poisonous soup that was made edible by a miracle, it is the faith and trust demonstrated by God's followers that is the issue about food; it is not always about the inherent physical qualities of the items we shove into our mouths. Thus it is not necessarily so that the meat of a rabbit (a prohibited item) is inherently evil or dangerous, while the meat of a cow (a permitted item) is inherently good and healthy. It is that the true spiritual value of food comes about through sufficient trust and faith in the Lord to be obedient to His commandments concerning diet, that were put there for both our physical benefit and for our spiritual benefit. So while Christians have been taught all of our lives that the choice of food is strictly a matter of preference for us, in fact the Bible sets up the matter of food as also involving moral choices. Why a moral choice? Because for a Believer the definition of a moral choice is to choose whether to obey the Lord's commands or not.

Verse 42 begins by setting up the all-important context for the next story. A man from a town in the northern kingdom brought 20 loaves of bread made from barley (NOT wheat) to Elisha. Barley was the first of the grain harvests of the year, and so barley loaves was the standard food offering in honor of the 3rd Biblical Feast, the appointed time called Bikkurim or Firstfruits. Now some of the Rabbis say that even though it seems so, it could **not** have been the Feast of

Bikkurim because the firstfruits must be taken to the priests and that didn't happen here. Well, that simply ignores the realities of the times when in the north they were discouraged, if not outright prohibited, by the ruling monarchy from even visiting the Temple in Jerusalem. There was also a distinct societal dislike between the northerners (Israel) and the southerners (Judah) that had gone on since the time of Joshua. In fact the entire reason for **Eliyahu's** and then Elisha's existence and mission was essentially as a kind of substitute priesthood and source of God's Word for the people of the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel.

But despite the government mandates and politically correct societal attitudes, there were those of the northern kingdom who sought to find ways to be as true to the Torah as they could. And so they wanted to continue to observe the Biblical Feasts and appointed times even though from a practical level it was impossible. This is something that we, as modern Believers need to emulate. We need to obey God by continuing to honor His laws and commands as best we can considering the prohibitions that our government mandates and barriers of peer pressure that our society erects. And we also have to do what parts of the laws and commands and feasts and sabbaths that we can do in view of the fact that there is no Temple to visit and no priesthood to preside. In fact, I see such efforts as our obligation.

This pious man from the north therefore brought his Torah commanded firstfruits offering to the only true representative of God there was available for him: Elisha. And the members of the prophet guild that Elisha oversaw then could receive some food in the same way that the Levite priests did, in the form of offerings and sacrifices. However, 20 small barley loaves was hardly enough for 100 men. But what that term "100 men" means is that they are the representative member of their families. Therefore it is not 100 individuals that are to be fed, but 100 of the prophet guild families.

Open your Bibles to John Chapter 6 as we read a story that most Christians know well.

READ JOHN 6:1 – 14

Notice all the parallels between the John 6 narrative of Christ feeding the multitudes and Elisha feeding the 100 families.

First, this took place in the north of Israel in both stories.

Second, this took place at Passover. Passover is a generic name in the New Testament for the bundle of 3 springtime feasts that consists of Passover, Matza, and Bikkurim that occur in rapid-fire succession. So our pious man of the north was celebrating the same feasts in going to Elisha as was Christ as He sought to feed the hungry crowds.

Third, notice that the barley bread (not wheat bread) is the primary food item involved.

Fourth, even though it is the disciples who at the center of the action (like with Elisha's prophet guild members), their families are to be fed as well.

Fifth, just as in the story of Elisha, not only was the barley bread miraculously multiplied to feed everyone present (men, women and children), but there was enough leftover to feed others or for those present to have some for later.

Now (not to be a heretic), but which story is patterned after which? Is the Elisha story patterned after the Jesus story, or vice versa? Of course the Yeshua story is patterned after the Elisha story. And besides all the evident parallels, do you know how I know this for certain without having to conjecture? Because of this direct statement that essentially concludes the Jesus story:

^{CJB} **John 6:14**

¹⁴ When the people saw the miracle he had performed, they said, "This has to be **'the prophet'** who is supposed to come into the world."

Why did the people suppose that Yeshua had to be "the prophet"? Because He performed exactly the same miracle during the same Biblical feasts as the Great Prophet Elisha had, over 800 years earlier, the multiplication of the barley loaves as recorded in 2nd Kings 4.

Let's move on to 2nd Kings Chapter 5.

READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 5 all

This next story about Elisha would have caused his fame to spread well beyond the boundaries of Israel and Judah because this miracle involved not a Hebrew but essentially a foreign outsider who was really an enemy.

Na'aman was a revered and respected chief of the Aramean army (meaning Syrian army). It cannot be overlooked that verse 1 even states that it was YHWH who brought about Aram's victory OVER Israel by using **Na'aman**. The important God-principle that is set down for us is

that the Lord doesn't just operate within the lives of Believers. He affects the history of mankind throughout the world because He is the God of all mankind. Let me set the stage for this story so that we can get the most from it. King **Achav** of Israel had some years earlier formed an uneasy alliance with Ben-Hadad King of Aram (Syria). But with the passing of time, Ben-Hadad's son wanted free of being a vassal to Israel and rebelled. He seized the city of Ramoth-Gilead in the Trans-Jordan and so King **Achav** led his army to go and take it back. In the process, Israel was soundly defeated and King **Achav** was killed.

Back and forth the two kingdoms of Syria and Israel went at one another; one gaining the upper hand for awhile, and then the other. At the time of our story Syria was now more dominant than Israel and while there was not outright war going on, nor was there a quiet peace, there were hostile skirmishes and raids on one another's territories that were traded on a near continual basis. And it seems that in one of these raids into Israel by Syria, they captured some Hebrews for slaves (perhaps one of the most common purposes for ancients to attack one another). Among those slaves taken was a young Hebrew girl who wound up as a house servant in **Na'aman's** home.

One day this little girl expressed concern for her master to his wife. The Israelite child seemed genuinely concerned for **Na'aman**, and as our story unfolds we see that indeed **Na'aman** must have been a decent man who treated his slaves well and thus won their affections. She says that she wishes that **Na'aman** could go see the Great Prophet because only this prophet in Israel could cure him of his **tzara'at**. Now while many English translations use the word Leprosy to translate **tzara'at**, that is not only highly unlikely (as formal leprosy that is now called Hansen's Disease was unknown in that era and in that location) it takes us down a rabbit trail in getting caught up in identifying the exact medical term for the skin condition that he might have suffered. However the issue of **tzara'at** is not the kind of skin condition but rather the cause. And anytime we see the word **tzara'at**, it is speaking of a visible skin disease that is caused by an inner spiritual condition of ritual uncleanness, sin, or both. In other words, the Lord has caused the victim's spiritual condition that is hidden to humans but is exposed to God, to now become literally and symbolically exposed for the entire world to see. **Na'aman** hadn't caught some contagious skin disease. Since it was the God of Israel who caused it to appear, it could only be removed by the God of Israel's prophet; and the little Hebrew girl house slave knew that.

Na'aman's skin disease was of such concern and discomfort that he was willing to try anything to get rid of it, so he went to his king and asked for permission to go to Israel and seek out healing. The concept of a god of a different nation having the power to heal was of no problem to the Oriental mind of that era. Of course how to access that god was a different matter, and the King of Syria figured that such access would only be granted by the king of the nation who claimed that particular god.

Kings had their gods, and gods had their prophets; that's how it worked according to the

ancient mindset. The King of Aram was happy to intercede for his great warrior leader **Na'aman** and so prepared a lavish gift to be presented to **Y'horam**, King of Israel. Along with the gift was a letter that explained that the purpose of the gift was so that the King of Israel would heal the Syrian military commander. **Y'horam** perfectly understood that this message was not a request, it was a demand. And considering how weak of a king Y'horam was, and how at the moment the King of Aram had the upper hand, Y'horam flew into a fit of anxiety and wondered just exactly how he was supposed to cure this gentile (and an enemy at that) of a disease that was thought to only affect Hebrews since it was brought on by Israel's God.

We will continue with this story in our next lesson.