

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

by Mario Seiglie

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2 KINGS 4-7 ELISHA'S POWERFUL MINISTRY AND MIRACLES



We now enter a fascinating part of scripture with many parallels in the New Testament and Jesus Christ. This is the main part of Elisha's ministry filled with incredible miracles and lessons for us.

As *Expositor's* states, "Chapters 4 through 7 make up the heart of what is frequently known as the Elisha cycle (chapters 2-13), being a collection of Elisha's miraculous deeds and ministry.

Elisha's name means, "God is my salvation," and he saved Israel from falling further into Baalism. While he was alive, people looked to God for their faith, but once he died, they again lapsed into idolatry. He was truly a type of a "superman" during his ministry since he possessed twice the portion of God's spirit to do miracles that Elijah had.

Halley says, "Elisha began his ministry in the reign of Jehoram, around 850 B.C., continuing through the reigns of Jehu and Jehoahaz, dying in the reign of Joash, about 800 B.C. [a ministry of 50 years]. He was a farmer boy...and got his prophetic training from Elijah. He and Elijah were very different. Elijah was like the tempest and earthquake; Elisha, like the still small voice. Elijah was flint-like; Elisha, gentle, gracious, diplomatic. Elijah was a man of the wilderness, with a cloak of camel's hair; Elisha lived in cities, dressed like other people. Yet Elijah's mantle fell on Elisha" (Bible Handbook, p. 203).

He performed at least twice the miracles than Elijah, at least twenty in all:

1. Dried up the Jordan	11. Floating ax head
2. Heals Jericho's waters	12. Predicts enemy hides
3. Predicts flood	13. Angels materialize
4. Widow's oil	14. Blinds army
5. Heals woman's womb	15. Removes blindness
6. Resurrects child	16. Predicts much food
7. Heals poisonous food	17. Emissary would die
8. Multiplies bread	18. Predicts 7 yr. drought
9. Heals Syrian general	19. Syrian king punished
10. Gehazi becomes leper	20. Bones resurrect man

A widow of a man of God asks for his help and says, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves" (2 K. 4:1). *The JFB Commentary* explains, "By the enactment of the law, a creditor was entitled to claim the person and children of the insolvent debtor, and compel them to serve him as bondmen till the year of jubilee should set them free."

Since God is a protector and cares for widows, He shows Elisha how to solve her money problem. She only had a flask of oil and he tells her, "Go borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones...Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, 'Bring me another vessel.' And he said to her, 'There is not another vessel.' So the oil ceased. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, 'Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest' (4:3-7). Oil was extremely valuable in those days and it was used primarily for five things:

1. As excellent cooking oil (food).
2. Fuel for the ubiquitous oil lamps (light).
3. As medicine (Is. 1:5; Lk. 10:34) (healing).
4. As a cosmetic after bathing (looks) (Ruth 3:3).
5. For commercial exchange (money) (1 K. 5:11).

Elisha had several schools where he developed the prophetic ministry. Halley mentions, "Samuel, it seems from 1 Sam. 19:20, had started a school of prophets at Ramah. Elisha had such schools at Bethel, Jericho, Gilgal and other places (2 K. 2:3, 5; 4:38; 6:1). Beside these, he seems to have resided at Carmel, Shunem, Dothan and Samaria. He must have been a sort of pastor-prophet-teacher. He was also adviser to the king. His advice was always acted on. He did not approve all that the kings did, but in times of crisis he came to their rescue.

"Elijah and Elisha, as a pair, in their personal lives and in public work, seem to have been a prototype, a fore-picture-in-action, of John the Baptist and Jesus, as a pair. John is called Elijah (mt. 11:14) and Jesus' ministry of kindness was an extensive expansion of Elisha's ministry. It's an illustration that men of utterly different types may work together for the same ends" (p. 205).

As Elisha made his circuit to the different schools, a rich lady would offer him food and lodging (as women would later help Jesus out). She even built a guest room for Elisha and his servant Gehazi. God saw this noble gesture and wanted to reward her. As Jesus later said, 'He who receives you receives Me....And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a

disciple...he shall by no means lose his reward” (Mt. 10:40-42).

So Elisha asked her what she needed. She, being wealthy, said she was fine. But since she was barren, he told her of the miracle that she would have a child. Since she and her husband were quite old, she thought he was just kidding her, but sure enough, the following year she had a healthy boy.

The years passed, and when he was old enough to help his father with the harvest, one day in the field he complained of a splitting headache. It was probably caused by a heatstroke--that can be deadly. A medical journal tells us, “Heat stroke results from a body that is unable to cool itself anymore. More than likely the victim goes into heat stroke after a prolonged period of heat exhaustion. There is no more sweat to cool the body and now the brain is preparing for the worst by shutting down unneeded organs to preserve the rest of the body. The victim may be unconscious and pale. What you are seeing is a person *close to death* and must get help quickly.”

So the boy died and his mother remembered all of Elisha’s miracle and went to fetch him. He returned with her, and after lying on the boy, very similar to what Elijah had done before, the boy was resurrected.

Next, Elisha visits one of the schools of the prophets in Gilgal. Since there was a drought and very little to eat, Elisha sent a student to fetch some wild vegetables from the fields to eat as a stew. Unfortunately, he brought a poisonous plant and put it in the stew. *Gill’s Commentary* says, “*Coloquintida*, (that resembles a cucumber) the leaves of which are very like to a vine, of a very bitter taste, and a very violent purgative, which, if not remedied, will produce ulcerations in the bowels, and issue in death.” When all ate of it, they noticed how bitter it was, and cried out, for they realized they had eaten poisonous food. Elisha calmly told them to fetch some flour and he poured it on the stew, miraculously making it delicious and harmless. It reminds us of what Christ later said about protecting His servants in the future from poisonous drinks as well (Mark 16:18).

Now comes the multiplication of the bread, as Christ would later do. His disciples had gathered to hear him teach, and with just twenty loaves of bread brought to him, he was able to feed a hundred men and have some left over—just like Christ would do!

Of all things, now the Syrian top general, who was a leper, seeks Elisha for healing. They had captured a young Israelite girl who told him about

Elisha’s miracles and that he could be healed. Syria at that time was sometimes Israel’s ally and at other times, it’s adversary. It was insulting to Naaman to go to Elisha for healing since he had his own god. But he had the humility and desperation to go. When he met him, Elisha told him he had to dip himself in the Jordan seven times. This offended Naaman since there are cleaner and better rivers in his own country. But a wise servant asked him if Elisha would have asked him to do some extraordinary feat, would he have not done it to cure himself?

So Naaman swallowed his pride and went to the Jordan and dipped himself seven times. After he did this, he was completely healed as the Bible says, “and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (5:14).

Naaman was so grateful, he wanted to reward Elisha with great wealth. But Elisha refused. He knew the miracle was not his but God’s and only God should take receive the glory. So then, Naaman says a startling thing—that he would reject his gods and adopt the Israelite God—in other words, conversion! He said, “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel....your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord’....Yet in this thing may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing” (5:15-18). This took enormous courage to do. *Unger’s Handbook* adds, “His official position required him to give lip service to Rimmon, the chief god of Syria, called also Hadad, but Naaman was really healed and saved” (p. 228).

Christ would later recall this incident to show that Naaman’s faith was genuine and exceptional. He said, “Assuredly I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly....many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:24-27).

One more incident occurred--a sad situation since Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, was tempted because of all Naaman was willing to give them. But after Elisha rejected the offer and Naaman’s group left, Gehazi surreptitiously went to Naaman and invented a story since of two of the sons of the prophets had come and he wanted to give them some presents, when he actually wanted the money (two talents of silver, the

equivalent of several thousands of dollars) and the luxurious clothing for himself. When he came back, Elisha was waiting and asked him where he had been. Gehazi lied, and then Elisha passed this terrible sentence on him for trying to make a profit from God's miracles: "Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow" (5:27). This is a warning for ministers never to charge for their services when miracles occur.

The next miracle is quite remarkable. Elisha's disciples decided to build him a training and lodging center in Jericho. They had to chop down some trees for the wood, and since they were next to the Jordan, suddenly, one of the ax heads came loose and landed in the deep part of the river. The disciple was distressed since it was a borrowed ax, and they were very costly. But Elisha just asked him to point to the place, and he threw a stick at the spot, and suddenly, the iron ax head came bobbling up and was retrieved. But we all know iron can't float! That's the miracle.

Now, the Syrians went on the warpath again against Israel but couldn't ambush any of the Israelite troops since Elisha would tell the king where they were hiding. So the king sent a large army to capture Elisha and they came to Dothan and surrounded the city. In the morning, a young man saw the great army and came to Elisha. But he told him, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, 'Strike these people, I pray, with blindness.' And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. Now Elisha said to them, 'This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.' But he led them to Samaria [the capital of Israel and where the king's palace stood]. So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, 'Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.' And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria! Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, 'My father, shall I kill them?' But he answered, 'You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them that

they may eat and drink and go to their master.' Then he prepared a great feast for them, and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel" (6:16-23).

Here is one of the few instances in the Old Testament where evil was not repaid with evil, but kindness. We read this same principle in Romans 12:20, "Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head" [they will be ashamed of their evil behavior]. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Now, the Syrians are back and lay a siege around Samaria, the capital city of Israel. No food can go in or out, and finally, even the women are eating their babies. Desperate, the king sends messengers to Elisha, and he predicts tomorrow there would be abundant food. The king can't believe it, but the next day, four lepers go to the enemy camp so they can either be taken as captives and given something to eat or be killed. To their surprise, they find the camp empty and all the goods intact. They tell the king, but he thinks it's a ruse. So he sent a scouting party and they come back and tell him the Syrians had fled. The Bible explains, "For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses—the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, 'Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!' Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact—their tents, their horses, and their donkeys—and they fled for their lives" (7:6-7).

So everything Elisha predicted had come true, there was abundance of food and the emissary who doubted and was disrespectful to him was trampled to death as the people rushed out the gate to go to the Syrian camp for food (7:20).

Next time, we conclude the ministry of Elisha and all of his incredible miracles.