

Kings and Prophets 14-02-14a

This is Friday, the 14th of February, 2014. We continue our study in 2 Kings chapter 4. We're looking at these ladies who had such an interesting relationship and interaction with the prophet Elisha in terms of provision from God, expressions of the power of God. So we'll do a quick review since it's been a couple of weeks, but we need to hasten forward because we have a real opportunity to compare these two ladies with the two incidents of the one lady that Elijah made similar contact and provision for back toward the end of 1 Kings.

But let's begin by dedicating our time and our concentration to God and to the truth of his word by going to the Lord in prayer. Father, what a blessing it is for us to spend this time to realize that this is our priority at the moment and we can cheerfully set aside every other concern, all of the other cares and affairs of this life and know that we are in the right place at the right time doing the right thing as we seek the ministry of your Holy Spirit in taking your word and implanting it in our hearts. We know that it is powerful, that it is alive, that it is transformational in a way that nothing else can do.

It brings us close to you. It makes us closer to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ and enables us to fulfill your will both now and in the ages to come. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word this evening, that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate it for us, minister it to us, help us to understand its meaning in its context as well as its applicability in our lives.

We know that all of these things help us to reflect your glory and accomplish your purpose. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's quickly rehearse what we have here in this chapter. And by rehearse I don't mean re-read, I mean just note what's here. In the first seven verses we had the widow whose husband had left her an enormous debt.

She goes to Elisha and he says, What shall I do for you? She says, I've got nothing but a jar of oil. He gives her instructions which she follows. He tells her, take all the empty vessels you can borrow, put them in your house, shut the door behind you and your sons, pour the oil into the vessels and set aside the full ones.

She does this when all of the vessels have miraculously become full by a means that isn't even described to us. She returns to Elisha and says, I've done everything you said. He says, go sell the oil and pay your debt and you and your sons live on the rest.

A couple of things to note about this aside from the obvious miraculous interest that it has. This is fundamentally in the category of provision. This is a provision the woman has no means to make for herself.

She can't obtain work. She cannot have her sons find gainful employment. The alternative in this situation, there are only two alternatives.

Either God will intervene or her sons will be impressed into slavery. She is going to be one of the poor widows who is going to have to rely on the corners of the fields that are ungleaned and is going to live a very impoverished, beggarly life. She goes to God when provision isn't there.

Of all of the possible observations you could make, the one that is probably most pertinent for us is to remember God's promise for provision and to claim it. The one caveat is that oftentimes God will remove provision to draw our attention to failure. So when we discover or observe that we suddenly have a provision issue, stop before throwing ourselves into the throne room and sobbing uncontrollably that, Oh Lord, my provision is gone.

We should check first for the obvious reasons why provision might go missing. It is a promise of God, so if it goes missing, why would God withhold a promise? God promised the children of Israel the land. Why did they lose it? God promised protection from enemies and prosperity in their agricultural pursuits.

Why would they lose that? In Israel, there was one prominent reason why those things would go away, and that was failure in the spiritual realm. It is not the only reason provision can go away. Don't look at somebody and say, well, your provision is gone.

You must be spiritually fouled up. A. This isn't an application to make to anybody but ourselves. B. There are, in fact, other reasons.

This can be testing for maturity growth. Sometimes we can become comfortable in the level of faith that we exercise, and God wants to stretch us. God wants to up the weight on the bar so that we can become stronger.

It is one thing to trust Him for daily needs and His supplies, and we become a bit accustomed and complacent. Well, God may send a famine in the land. Is that famine for judgment, for discipline, to draw people's attention to the fact that the Lord controls the weather, or is it for the purpose of testing, for the purpose of God glorifying Himself by the ways that He can provide in unusual circumstances, to draw the attention of other people to a particular situation? So it isn't an immediate conclusion to draw.

It's not the obvious assumption that just because our provision goes missing, and I say again, only pay attention to your own provision. As soon as you start looking over the fence and saying, somebody else's provision has dried up, I think they're messed up in some way, you've got much bigger problems than provision. This is strictly for personal observation.

I draw this conclusion by the closed door in this passage. This woman's situation, the level that she has come to because of her husband's inability to manage the money, this is private. She's not to tell the neighbors why she's borrowing the vessels.

This isn't anybody's business but her own. She and her sons in that family, God is dealing with this situation behind their closed door. This is one-on-one, the individual with God, and this is

the way we should treat it.

Do not, I repeat, do not try to look at other people and draw conclusions about their spiritual life, growth, status or anything else based on their apparent provision or lack thereof. This is dangerous, particularly because if they are in fact being judged and you decide that you think they're being judged, the judgment that they are being judged with will fall on you. This is a biblical truth.

It is a promise. The measure with which you measure to others will be measured out to you. So, my thought is, I am not measuring to anybody.

I'm going to get measured out enough on my own account without inheriting judgment that I've imputed to others. So, you can carefully surmise and observe. We are to mark out those who are in the faith and those who aren't.

But don't make that judgment based on apparent levels of provision. There are other ways to know if someone is walking with the Lord or not. It is perfectly fine to observe.

It is perfectly fine to ascertain and make a guess because we have to know with whom to associate and with whom to separate, right? We're talking about judgment. Judgment is applying a penalty, inflicting some punishment on someone. I will punitively do this, that or the other.

I will talk about them and diminish their reputation. I will mock them quietly in my small circle of fellow gossips or whatever it might be. Dangerous, dangerous, dangerous.

So, having said that, this is between the widow and the Lord via the prophet. It's behind closed doors. But, she goes in the right direction.

Regardless of what has happened in this family in the past, she goes to the Lord, she appeals to the Lord, trusts in the mercy of the Lord, and her faith is rewarded with provision. This is not prosperity, but it is deliverance from debt, it is deliverance from slavery, and there is provision for the future. They will be provided for.

It doesn't say that they are excessively comfortable. It doesn't say that, behold, she began to sell oil to all of her friends and became a modest millionaire or a shekeler, whatever you want to call it. They have provision.

God will supply needs, and He has met this need. That's the first scenario here. Beginning in verse 8, we have the Shunammite woman.

As an English major, I was interested to see all of the different ways people spell Shunammite. Shunammite, Shunammite, one M, two Ms, be that as it may, it's the town of Shunam. I mentioned when we last met the history of this town.

Abishag, the situation even previous to that with the Philistines encamping there, the Witch of

Endor. There is some history in this place. And it is no accident that this lady is identified by her location rather than by a name.

Did you realize that the Bible is so explicit and so beautifully intricately woven? We do not know. This Shunammite woman, there are three separate very significant incidents that revolve around her that we're going to see. And we don't know her name.

You know whose name we do know and it is repeated several times in Scripture? Haman's wife. Haman, in the days of Esther and Mordecai, Haman's wife is named. I found this out by accident because her name is very close to a word we're going to be looking at tonight.

It's right next to it in the lexicon. And I thought, what? It said wife of Haman and there's like four or five references in there. I thought, the wife of Haman? We have her name? We don't have the Shunammite woman's name? Why is this? Because her identification by location appears to be important.

So, it happened one day, Elisha went to Shunamm where there was a notable woman. And you remember this account and I just want to quickly hit a few of the highlights. You remember when she makes this wonderful provision for him she is looking outward, she is anxious, she obviously cares about the things of God and when she sees the man of God she sees an opportunity and she avails herself of it.

This took some thought. What can I do? And it's a wonderful gift that people have where they can figure out the best way to be of aid and of service. And she has this beautiful blessing that she brings into the life of Elisha by providing sustenance and refreshment for him.

He says to Gehazi in verse 12, Call the Shunammite woman. When he had called her she stood before him and he said, Say now to her. She stood before him.

And he is talking through Gehazi. More about that. What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army? I dwell among my own people.

I was musing on this this last week. We talked about the fact that her value is really in the people that she is related to more so than could she have influence in the royal court. Could her husband be promoted? Could they obtain some lucrative contracts with the civil government or the military establishment? But it occurred to me, this reminds me a little bit, if you remember many years ago when we studied 1 Samuel.

And David first comes to visibility and notability and is brought to the royal court. And he is invited to live in the palace and to circulate in the royal environment. And he does so for a while.

And then you remember, he goes back to his home. And we analyzed that a bit to find out why would David come up to the royal court. This is the place of advancement.

There are people that would kill for that kind of access and that kind of insider privilege. And rubbing elbows with the high and the mighty and the influential and word of mouth and my good friend and the mutual back slapping and all of that. And David purposely leaves all of that behind and goes back to his father's house.

I suggest, I suspect that this lady is of that same mind. She's not interested in royal favor. She has seen the court of Jehoram.

She's not interested in influence in or around the army. Because this is the army that is corrupt as is the rest of the government. God had to bless them with a supernatural victory when they went around to attack the Moabites.

And she says, I dwell with my own people. And I think this implies to us that the people with whom she chooses to associate are people of faith. People who share her attitude toward God and the things of God.

And that, just like David, she would rather be with those people than be in the royal courts and have influence in high places. She would rather be connected with these people who share her love for the Lord. I dwell with my people.

These are my people. So, this is not enough to satisfy Elisha. He wants to reciprocate in some way.

So he asks Gehazi, what then can be done? She has no son and her husband is old. This is a blessing he is able to confer in invoking the power of the Lord to bless her with something that, like Hannah and many other great women of the Bible, if she's got this heart for the Lord and she loves the people of God, the ultimate thing that a woman with that heart and that nature can do is invest that heart in offspring, in a child and raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And have a fresh avenue to express that heart.

And so, Elisha recognizes when the suggestion is made that yes, this is something that would please the Lord. Give her a special opportunity to have yet one more my people. Someone who's going to have that walk with the Lord.

So, he says, about this time next year, and this is an interesting phrase that occurs elsewhere in scripture. Literally in Hebrew, this is in the time of life. Next year isn't actually there.

This is literally the time of life. And this occurs in some similar contexts. For example, when the angel is speaking in Genesis 18.10, this is the Lord speaking in Genesis 18.

I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son. It's a similar phrase. And back four verses later, is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you.

But this is the same idea. At the time of life. Some Hebrew scholars think that this is the spring.

Because this is the time when the plant world returns to life after going dormant in the winter. And you have this referenced even in 17.21 of Genesis. My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.

This time of life. At the time of living. It doesn't just say you will have a son, it says you shall embrace a son.

And this particular word, kavkot, if you will, or chobket, actually, is a participle. You will be embracing. You know that O-E infix I've talked about so often.

This is chobket. And the chobek part of that tells us it's a participle. So, you will be embracing, you will be enfolding, you will be cradling and carrying a son.

And this particular verb, chabak, is one that is used for emotional embrace. And you find this over in Genesis as well. Genesis 29.13, when Laban heard the report about Jacob, his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house.

In Genesis 33.4, when Jacob meets Esau, you remember he's so worried about it, he's just wrestled with the man until dawn and got crippled up and sent all these presents ahead trying to kind of soften the reunion. But Esau ran to meet him in 33.4 of Genesis and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept. Same thing in 48, Genesis 48, you know what, you're going to be the closing part of the story of Joseph.

The eyes of Israel were dim with age so they could not see. Joseph brought Ephraim and Manasseh near. He kissed them and embraced them.

And what this tells us is that this is especially significant and especially meaningful because it is the future. When a couple has a child, that's an investment in the future. She can raise this child as Hannah raised Samuel looking to the future.

This is somebody that can perpetuate and look forward. And when you think in national terms, when you think nation of Israel, this becomes almost figurative for the future of the nation. If you can raise up the next generation and by love and personal investment in Colgate, when your children ask you, you will tell them, this is what the Lord has done.

And this lady is going to have wonderful stories to tell about the prophet that has stayed in their house and so on. So when he says you will embrace a son, he knows based on her previous treatment and her investment in her people that this is going to be a wonderful thing that she is going to not just take on as a duty, but as a wonderful enthusiasm and opportunity. And you can tell that this really strikes a chord because she says, No, my Lord, man of God, do not lie to your maid servant.

She's not really calling him a liar. She's basically saying this is just too good to be true. I mean, she's ready to believe it, but it's just beyond her hopes.

I don't think she even dared to pray for such a thing. And this also speaks of her humility. She figured if God hadn't given her a child, it was because he had his reasons and she had not even dared to hope or to ask that God might bless her with a son.

And so when the prophet says you're going to have one and embrace him, it takes her a while to process it. You wonder, you know, when Gabriel came to Mary and said, you're going to conceive and bear a son, Emmanuel, the thing is in you, conceived of the Holy Ghost, she didn't say, Ah, don't lie to your maid servant. She said, let it be to me according to your word.

But it's a very emotional moment for her. So the woman conceived and bore a son when the appointed time had come. And once again, this is ha-moed ha-zeh ka-et chai.

And this is when the, we talked about moed and chait and et when we talked about the times and seasons in Ecclesiastes. Times and seasons. And when the time of life came around, chayah, you know, l'chayim, this is the word for life, and it's in this context, but it's difficult to render into English, so they just say the appointed time had come, which Elisha had told her.

So the child grew. One day he goes out to his father to the reapers. This is not an accidental detail.

He's out with the reapers. Why would it matter? It does matter, and we're going to see why. It took me a week to figure this out, and I think I have figured it out.

You can see. You can decide. To the reapers, he said to his father, My head, my head.

You think, well, what is it, sunstroke? But think about this. What is the distance between the springtime of planting and the falltime of reaping? From the time you plant until the time you reap, in the agriculture world, about how long is it? You would think six months, but it's actually closer to three, because the stuff grows through the summer, and in the early fall you're reaping. And the reason that this pertains is that this is the fall.

It's probably August, late July, something like that. And if they had planted in April, May, somewhere in there, he's out. But they're with the reapers, and you can imagine the hot blazing sun.

Anybody that's baled hay after it's grown in the summer, you know that there's a real possibility of getting very hot. And he says, My head, my head. This almost suggests to us sunstroke of some sort.

But it has to do with the heat and the light, apparently, being too much for him. So he says to his servant, Carry him to his mother. He can't drop everything and care for the child, so he says, Take him back where he can be cared for.

So when the servant had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon and then died. So this was not even in the heat of the day. This was in the morning, mid-

morning, maybe 10 o'clock or so, and within an hour or two, he has died.

It must have just really been getting hot. And you know in the late summer, if you haven't done your outdoor work by 10 or 10.30, it's starting to get really hot and it just gets worse through mid-afternoon. But he's out there in the morning, and by noon he is dead.

So she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door upon him. She doesn't send word to the husband. She doesn't tell the neighborhood.

She doesn't gather the mourners and everybody starts crying. She called to her husband and said, Please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys that I may run to the man of God and come back. Notice she doesn't say, Husband, our son has died.

She says, I want to take an urgent trip. Saddle me a donkey that I may run to the man of God. He says, Why are you going to him today? Why does he ask that question? Because he doesn't know the son has died.

And she does not tell him. This is a very private woman. I mean she doesn't tell her husband that their son has died.

Why? Well, if a problem occurs and you think you can fix it before all of the concomitant dominoes fall and the effects happen, my guess, and this is just a guess, especially based on the fact that the father, when he sees the son getting sick, just sends him away. The man is agreeable to the desires of his wife, but he doesn't seem to be of the same heart and of the same mind. He tolerates.

I think he loves her. I think he humors her, accommodates her, but he's not a man of God in the way that she is a woman of God. That much seems clear.

And she sees this as a spiritual issue. And unfortunately for her, her husband isn't the spiritual head of the house. Normally the man would take charge of this situation and say, let's call the prophet.

But she apparently doesn't think the man is going to attack this as a spiritual problem. He's going to do some manly thing, some earthly thing. You know, he's going to, you know, knock a couple of reapers in the head for not noticing sooner.

She just doesn't confide in her husband in what she considers to be a spiritual crisis because she runs to the man of God. She doesn't run to the physician. She doesn't run to the snake oil salesman.

She doesn't run to the midwife or anybody that might have medicinal skills. She says, we need the man of God. This son came from the man of God.

This son is an issue as a blessing from the Lord. And if something has happened to him, this is a God thing. And she doesn't share the God thing with her husband.

And I think that's significant. She's almost a widow in the spiritual sense because he's not involved except to provide transportation. Well, and notice he says, why are you going today? Why are you going to church? It ain't Sunday.

Why are you praying? This is not prayer time. She says, well, you know. And if you put the right look on her face at this point, well is all the answer.

She says well and rolls her eyes and gets on the donkey and leaves. But she doesn't make an explanation. She doesn't try to enter into anything whatsoever.

She just says, look, basically, trust me, this is a good thing. I've got my reasons. Leave me alone.

Go back to the reapers. I've got this. It's all good.

Well, that's where we're going to leave it while we take our break. But as a point of application, the first woman and the second woman, one is an issue of provision. The other is an issue of blessing.

This son was not a necessity. He was a spiritual gift. He was an over and above.

This lady was content to dwell with her people. She was content to take care of the prophet of God. And you can see the contrast.

The other is a dire necessity in the area of provision. The lady goes to the man of God. The man of God asks her a question.

She answers and then she follows instruction. Provision is made. Here, a blessing, an over and above delight from the Lord that she embraces emotionally is suddenly removed.

And she sees this as a spiritual issue and she immediately goes to the man of God. Whether it is in the necessities and in the mundane details of our life, when we find anomalies and shortfalls, it is time to go to the Lord. When it seems that in the area of blessing there is suddenly a cloud across the sun, there is suddenly a deprivation or an unexpected loss, we first turn to God.

The details of our life, the circumstances of our life are designed to maintain, enhance and in some cases return our focus to the Lord God in heaven. Everything in our life is a spiritual issue. From the mundane to the divine.

From the commonplace to the exceptional. Everything is a spiritual issue. And our first appeal, our first thought should be let me go before the Lord.

We don't have to work through the intermediary or the prophet and his intermediary. She is working kind of two guys in between. I talk to Gehazi who talks to Elisha who talks to the Lord, who talks back to Elisha, who talks back to Gehazi, who talks back to me.

That whole chain of communication has been shortened. We as children of God go straight into

the throne room. Hebrews chapter 10.

Let us enter boldly. Find grace to help in time of need. And that's the place to go.

Think about these ladies. This is our example. This is our procedure.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see why it was the reapers. We're going to see bodily contact, bodily functions.

It's a very interesting come to pass when we come back.