

Kings and Prophets 14-02-21b

We pick up our study now, looking at the parallels between Elijah and Elisha, specifically with reference to these ladies with whom they spent time, resided during their travels. And we turn now to 2 Kings chapter 4, and here we're going to have an expansion of the theme. We still have a dearth of provision situation.

This woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets, and we've been through these details many times. The difference is, if you keep Elijah in mind, who approaches whom here? In the first case, God said, Elijah, go to Zarephath, I've got a widow there, she's going to take care of you. Here, the woman approaches Elisha, and says, you're a servant of my husband, and so on.

Now, step back, we're going to think big picture, we're going to assume for the sake of argument, to help ourselves out a little bit, and to help keep this brief, think of Elijah as the Old Testament age, the age of the law, the age where God calls out the nation of Israel. Israel didn't stick up its hand and say, oh Lord God, we'd sure love to be your people, did they? God approached, like Elijah going to the widow, God initiated, God said to Abraham, get you up out of your land and kindred, and I will make a nation out of you. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the 12 sons of Jacob, and God comes to them.

Years later, with Moses, God sends Moses. They are crying out in their affliction, Moses has to come and introduce them to the God that is going to deliver them and take them to the land. So you have that idea, that sort of call and response in the Elijah story, representing the earliest days of the nation of Israel.

The prophet is the intermediary, he is the representative of God. What is the nature of the deliverance for the widow in Zarephath? Take this little bit of oil and this little bit of flour that you have and dedicate it to the man of God and you will receive provision. And she does so.

This little bit is multiplied in and through this response of faith. Little bit of oil, little bit of flour, becomes a lot of oil and a lot of flour and ensures the future of the lady and her son. Son dies and is brought back and that future is once again secured.

There is an interruption but there is growth and progress in it. It is all at God's instigation, it is by God's power, requires a response of faith. You come to 2 Kings 4, this woman comes to Elisha.

Now, how does she know who Elisha is? How does Elisha get his bona fides, his identification card? Remember in another place they tell the king, well Elisha is the man that poured water on the hands of Elijah. He was Elijah's servant, right? Traveled around with Elijah and so he is known. He is known by association.

Elisha doesn't just drop on a parachute out of the blue. He is derived from, descended from, extended from, pushed forward by and identified with the ministry of Elijah. So he is derivative

in that sense.

He has got links going backward. Elijah has nothing previous. He doesn't say, well, you know, I am from the school of Samuel or you know, a high tub or somebody was my father.

He just comes out of nowhere. Elisha has a source and it is Elijah. So this woman goes to Elisha.

He is known, he is established. She says, your servant, my husband is dead and so on. We have looked at this in great detail.

So he says to her, once again, what is the nature of the deliverance? We are an extremist. My two sons are going to be hauled off into slavery. What does he say to do? Here is a sequence of actions.

What did Elijah do with the widow Zarephath? Take the oil, take the flour, bake me a cake, bring it to me because the promise of God is thus and so. She believes the promise and she responds. Here, we are destitute, my husband is dead, my sons are about to be hauled off into indentured servitude.

I have got nothing but a jar of oil. He says, borrow vessels from everywhere. Take them into your house.

Shut the door behind you with you and your sons. Pour the oil into all of these vessels. Once again, in this case, there is no proffered promise.

This is a difference, right? Elijah gave the woman a promise. God says the oil and flour are not going to fail so long as the drought lasts. Here, there is no promise.

He says, look, just do this stuff. So, in a way, it is an advance because now there is not a simple, oh well, God says this stuff is going to last me until the end of the drought. This is just an odd request.

Take these, borrow empty jars from everywhere, take them in your house, shut the door, you and your sons. There is no explicit promise given. She came to him.

He did not come to her. But she still responds in faith. She could have said, why should I do that? How is that going to solve my problem? What do you mean, pour into all the vessels? Did you hear me when I told you I have only got a little bit of oil? Are you deaf? How old are you now? Hearing that thunder of God taking your hearing away, did you hear the part where I said I've only got a little jar of oil? What's with all the empty vessels? But she doesn't doubt.

She has faith. And this isn't even an explicit promise. Her faith in this case is more in the person of the prophet himself.

In Elijah's case, Elijah goes and delivers the word of the Lord. She says, now I know you're a man of God, and the word of God in your mouth is truth. Here, this woman takes for granted

that the word in the mouth of Elijah is truth.

And so she goes and does it based on his word. She doesn't require the explicit promise. When we step back and look at our large picture, how does this reflect in the remembering that all of this has to do with the history of the nation of Israel, and in a larger sense with the human race itself.

But in the Old Testament day, the nation of Israel is put for believers who are in the world. They are uniquely the people of God. And if you're going to be people of God in the Old Testament dispensation, in the Old Testament age, whether it's the time of the patriarchs or the time of the nation of Israel, you have to come to where that faith exists.

It's in the family of Abraham. It's ultimately in the nation of Israel. It's in the line of Seth, as opposed to the line of Cain.

There is a group throughout the Old Testament, Genesis through Malachi. There is a group where the people of God are found. It begins in the line of Seth.

It extends down through the household of Noah, and then specifically through Shem, down to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and into the formalized nation of Israel. There is the people of God. It's a small minority when you look at the earth.

And the confusion of languages at Babel, it's God says, all the nations, Satan, you can have them. You're the God of this world. I've got this one little remnant, as it were.

This one son of the widowed woman. And when it is in danger of extinction, God preserves it. When famine comes and it looks like it's going to be wiped out, God provides.

When it looks like death is going to cut off its future, God... And in the largest sense, where is the death of the son for the nation of Israel? Where is the contact point between the Old Dispensation and the New? What stands and divides the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, and the New, the age in which we live? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is His death that establishes the basis for the New Covenant. This is the New Covenant in my blood, He tells the disciples in the Old Testament.

It's both the basis for the New Covenant to Israel. Remember in the Old Testament, I will make a New Covenant with the house of Judah, with the house of Israel. Take out their heart of stone, give them a heart of flesh, and so on.

But it is also a New Covenant that establishes the Church. And within one generation of the death of the Lord Jesus, you have the death of the nation. 70 A.D., the nation of Israel formally ceases to exist.

And it is the death of the Son, capital S, circa 30 A.D., actually I should say A.D. 30, and it is the death of the nation in A.D. 70. And there is this time where you look in vain to find the nation of

Israel. The Israel that you have on the map over there in the Middle East right now is not biblical Israel.

God has not gathered those people. They are not responding to a divine commission to return to the land. And they won't be the nation until the Israel clock, the Israel dispensation for the 70th week of Daniel comes into being.

Until that clock starts ticking again, there is no divinely ordained nation of Israel. And with all due respect to the folks that are over there now in Jerusalem and Haifa and the West Bank and all the rest of it, that's not biblical Israel. And sometimes, especially evangelicals in this country have difficulty maintaining the distinction in their mind.

It's fine to be sympathetic to Israel, but don't do it on a biblical basis. It's a completely different set of parameters. We have, as the United States of America, we have the same kind of treaty obligations to Israel that we've had to a lot of other places, like Vietnam and Korea and other nations with whom we have entered into national treaty.

And we owe it to them to be faithful to the terms of those treaties. But it's not biblical. You can be as sympathetic as you want to be to the Jewish people.

There are Jewish people all over the world. Plenty of them in this country. Plenty of them in the Middle East.

Still a lot of them in Europe. And you can think about God's dealings with them all down through history. The fact that they still exist as an identifiable people comports with biblical truth.

But you've got to be careful because this is the age of the Church and there is neither Jew nor Greek. Think about it. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek.

Now, can you identify Gentiles and Jews? Yes. Just like in Christ there is neither male nor female. Obviously, there are males and females.

But in Christ, this is not the basis for making false judgments about treatment. We treat people equally in Christ. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are brethren, Jews and Gentiles, in Christ. We are brethren, slave and free, employers and employees, masters and servants in Christ. Those distinctions don't have a functional component in the Church.

And that extends to international attitudes. But death of the son is tragic unless you step back and see that this is the occasion for resurrection. You can't have a resurrection without a death.

And this is the beauty of God's plan and purpose. The glory of God is going to be reflected in Israel when Israel is raised from the dead as a nation. And the son of the widow represents the future the heritage, the ongoing presence of the family that that widow represents.

So, as we look at chapter 4 and we see that the vessels are full and the lady says to one of the two sons, bring me another vessel. He says, there is not another vessel and the oil ceases at that point. The provision of God is perfect.

There was just enough oil and flour for the widow of Zarephath and her son and Elijah. There wasn't any left over. They didn't say, and behold, there were barrels of flour and jars of oil all over the place once the rain fell.

It was perfect. There was nothing left over. Here, there is just enough oil to fill all of the available vessels.

This will sustain the woman. She's going to be able to sell these back probably to the owners of the jugs. It's what I would do.

Hey, you know that jug I borrowed? I'm bringing it back. How would you like to buy the oil inside? And this is going to be sufficient to pay off her debt and sustain her and her sons in the future. This has implications when you get to the Lord Jesus multiplying food.

And there is an appropriate amount of food provided in the multiplication of the bread and the fish. So, if you're taking up baskets afterward, what does this tell you? People are rejecting an appropriate level of provision. It was provided and they're not accepting it.

This has significance. That's why Jesus points it out to the disciples in the boat. When we fed the 5,000, how many baskets did you take up? When we fed the 4,000, how many baskets did you take up? Do you not yet understand that there is a level of rejection of divine provision in Israel and this is going to be the basis for judgment.

This is going to be the basis for taking the gospel to the Gentiles because of this rejection. They're not doing what the widow did in Zarephath, taking the word of the Lord and living on the provision that is exactly right. The picture is there in the Old Testament of what the nation should do and it's tragic that they don't see it, they don't understand it, they don't do it.

Point of application. If we study these stories and you and I do not recognize God's provision and lay hold of it and exploit it the way these ladies do, we will suffer the same fate as the nation of Israel does when they fail to learn these lessons, fail to follow these examples. Yes, adversity will come.

Yes, trial will come. Challenges to provision. Challenges to our view of the future.

My son has died. Is this a result of my sins? You've got to think through the issues. These things have come for the glory of God so that we can appreciate it, so that we can say with the lady in Zarephath, now I know.

Now I know something I did not know before. I appreciate the truth of God. I appreciate the ultimate messenger of that truth who is the Lord Jesus Himself, the Word made flesh who dwelt

among us.

Now I know He is the real deal and I know that the Word of God is truth. And this is the conclusion God wants us to draw. We are going to be tried.

Jesus told the disciples in this world, you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. How did the Lord Jesus overcome the world? Did He do it by fiat? Did He do it by command? Peace, be still? When the Lord Jesus said, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

What is the basis of that victory? Overcome, you know, is Nikao. The noun form is Nike. That's why they named the shoes that.

Wear these shoes and you'll win. Why does Jesus say to him who overcomes, I will grant. Be of good cheer.

I have overcome. Follow my example and be an overcomer. What is the basis of that overcoming? What does Paul say? If in this life only we hope in Christ, if Jesus is just kind of a Aladdin's lamp that helps us solve problems in the near term, if the genie pops out and we get wishes and He'll solve our money problems and solve our health problems and solve our relationship problems, that's pretty much our three areas of challenge.

If that's all it is, Paul says we are of all men most miserable. Why? What's he talking about in that context? Resurrection. Resurrection.

It is the resurrection that makes Christian faith meaningful. It is the resurrection through which the Lord Jesus overcomes the world. Oh death, where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory? The Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrection led captivity captive and now gives gifts to men.

It's the resurrection. Remember years ago back in the Clinton era I think they had that bumper sticker it's the economy stupid. And he won the election by focusing on this as the issue.

His argument was the economy is broken and it needs to be fixed. I'm the guy that can fix it. Well, in the human race death is the problem.

Death by sin. Whereas by one man sin entered the world and death by sin so that death passed upon all men because all have sinned. Romans.

The Lord Jesus Christ overcomes in resurrection. This raising of these sons is huge. It's the great center post of these stories.

In both cases it establishes the overcoming power of God and it foreshadows the return of the entire nation of Israel. These are hard times. The country is divided.

Why do you think the lady has two sons? Judah and Israel. In the Elisha story it is an expansion.

She's got two sons but the two sons are one.

This is still the future but now there are two sons in the days of Elisha. Why? Because Elijah represents the old days the patriarchal days the days of the law under Moses when you had a single nation a single future a single line of generations going down. Well, now in the days of Elisha you have two.

You've got Judah and Israel. And in the days of Elisha foreshadowing Jesus Christ you've got Jews and Gentiles. You've got the two peoples of God both of whom have covenants both of whom have a destiny both of whom have a future.

And so not only do you have two sons in the first case here in chapter 4 but in the story of Elisha you've got two ladies. With Elijah it was the one widow of Zarephath. With Elisha you've got the woman who is the widow of the sons of the prophets.

Gee, which of the two peoples of God would she represent? She's the wife of who? The sons of the prophets Who are the people that are the sons of the prophets who benefit from the ministry of the sons of the prophets? It's Israel, right? Who is the woman here who is going to represent in shadow and in proleptic anticipation the church? It's the Shunammite woman. What did the Shunammite do? The first Shunammite. Who's the first Shunammite woman? Abishag.

And what did she do for the creaky old king of Israel? Brought warmth and life back to his cold, fading bones. What does the church do for the faith of Israel? It's like Abishag. Brings life and health back to what is fading and passing away.

David is in the process of going to that son that he lost. But she is young and warm and faithful and diligent and a great blessing to him. Well, here we have the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4. And she here is wedded to this old husband who is almost a stage prop.

He's like a two-dimensional cutout. He's just there to be there. Right? Again, she owes her existence to him, but he's a lifeless, two-dimensional figure.

She's the one that counts. She's the one that is going to recognize the value of the prophet and the message of the prophet and welcome him and embrace him and his message. And through this, she is going to have a future.

Isn't this what the church does? We take the message of God in the Old Testament and we embrace it in the way that Israel did not. The husband is out there busy trying to do business, trying to keep the reapers reaping. But his future is on the line here.

And the little child says, My head, my head. So, she is very active here. In the first case, Elijah took the child up.

Elijah brought the child back down and delivered him to his mother. The woman makes all of

this happen. She turns Elisha into sort of a passive character, doesn't she? Who does the traveling? Who does the initiating? Who says shalom to the husband and says shalom to the servant and gets to the prophet and makes this thing happen? I will not let you go.

She grabs his feet. I'm not leaving until you come with me. She knows the power of God that is available through this prophet and she will not rest until she gets it.

This should be us. We want to be this Shunammite woman. That's who she represents.

She foreshadows, she anticipates the vibrant living faith of the church taking the Old Testament truth and breathing new life into it by faith, doing what Israel didn't do with it. The husband doesn't care if the prophet comes in or not. This lady knows how valuable it is.

She sets up a room. She puts in a table and a chair. This is our appreciation for the Old Testament truth and indeed all the biblical truth.

We, you and I, want to be this lady. We want to have a room in our soul with a table and a chair and a bed where this truth can come and reside and live and make a difference for us. This is where our future is and when we think that there has been a tragic loss and that the future is in doubt, where do we go? We go back to this truth and its source and we cling to it and we do not let it go until the power of God restores life and the future for us because we know this.

This lady never has any doubt and she also knows what is not going to suffice. The dead stick staff of the prophet, that's not going to suffice. Gehazi, the intermediary, is not going to suffice.

She goes to the source. This should be us. So again, when we step back and look at these and we look at them side by side and we see God's dealing with Israel in the Old Testament, He initiates, He makes them a people, He carries their future up, He brings it back down, He says, here you go.

But Elisha represents the fresh immediacy and double life that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. And do you want to be the widow of Zarephath? And you receive that acknowledgement? That's great. But if I had a choice of which widow to be, and when I say widow, I mean functionally widow.

There is a husband, but there's a sense in which she's a widow. But you think about that Shunammite woman and you think about the amplified benefit that she gets. And you remember when we went over to chapter 8? She is going to go through a time of crisis.

She's going to go through a time of deprivation. But notice, in the time of drought, does she get an unfailing jar of oil and barrel of flour? Does she go into her house and pour oil into jars behind closed doors? What happens to this lady? She is relocated and thrives in a foreign land. Her blessing and her provision is not tied to the land and it's not tied to a jar and it's not tied to a barrel.

It's not even tied to the prophet. God is going to prosper her and bless her in foreign circumstances, outside the land, among the Philistines for crying out loud. What does this remind you of? Who else in a time of crisis burgeoned and prospered and thrived in the land of the Philistines? David? He did well in the land of the Philistines in a time of oppression, in a time of dearth and deprivation.

She's going to do the same thing and it comes full circle because after the drought is over, after the famine ends and she comes back in 2 Kings 8, everything is restored. The Shunammite has everything returned. And Jesus told the disciples, He mentioned this last time, If you have had to do without for my name's sake, you'll have it restored a hundredfold.

This Shunammite and her son, yes, she represents Israel and the future of Israel in an expanded form just like the widow of Zephath. But everything with Elisha is double and she's got a double significance. And what was hidden in Old Testament days and what was hidden until the Apostle Paul began to reveal the mystery, what was hidden until the Lord Jesus Christ started explaining it on the road to Emmaus is the hyper-significance, the above and beyond representation that this account is imbued with and that's the church, that's us.

So, what? When we think about these stories, when we think about these ladies, when we think about the word of the prophet, we think about the provision of God, the presence of God, the power of God, what do we come away with? You and I are part of a tremendous plan and purpose of God that was established before the world was ever created. When the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy, part of what they were celebrating and rejoicing over wasn't just the physical creation of the earth, it was the opportunity to see the character of God and the plan and purpose of God unfold in this subordinate creation. And they were excited to see this come into being because for them it is a Bible.

Can you imagine if you lived in a communist country, you're in Albania or somewhere and all of a sudden you're given the revelation of God and you get the chance to open it and study it and find things out about God? This is why the angels sang at the founding of this universe and this creation and this earth and the human race. Angels study us. We are their Bible.

God's program, His provision, His operation and interaction with us is their Bible, their Old and New Testament. And in the same way, we look at these things and we, in our experiences, come into contact with the power of God. And we're a part of it.

This isn't just a life where you go to work and you buy groceries and you clean things and try to muddle through somehow. Remember that Christmas song? Have yourself a merry little Christmas, we'll all muddle through somehow. How pathetic is that? As you talk about a depressing Christmas song.

If the fates allow, we'll muddle through somehow. What a dog-eared, depressing, downer, brown, dead stick song that is. You and I are part of a living, vibrant, plan and purpose and program of God.

It is infused with God's power in His Word and in His Spirit. And as we encounter the ups and downs of life, the ups and the downs, think about these ladies. Think about, in particular, this Shunammite woman.

We have an access that the Old Testament people... She had to go 25 miles to find the prophet. We have to go no further than the Holy Spirit residing in our souls. We can immediately step into the throne room of God.

But we should have this same attitude. Claim the promise of God. Leverage the presence of God and the power of God.

It is ours because we are in Christ. And we have what a lot of these folks never had. And you look at Jacob clinging to the man until dawn.

I will not let you go until you bless me. Do we have even a fraction of that attitude? Do we have even a fraction of the importunate widow story that Jesus told? Because the lady keeps pestering the judge, He finally gives her what she asks for. Are we lazy? Are we apathetic? Are we indifferent to the grace of God? All of these things have been written for our instruction.

The ends of the ages are upon us. We've got a limited time in this life to avail ourselves, to exploit and explore the power and the presence of God. To say with that first lady, now I know who you are and that what you say is true.

We have the privilege, like this Shunammite lady, of not only having our son restored to life, what is the first thing she does when this child comes back to life? She falls at the feet of the prophet because she recognizes that this is a God thing. That's who we want to be. That's how we want to approach and deal with the circumstances of our life.

These women are powerful Old Testament examples of what is possible because of our relationship with God. And these are just shadows. We live in the age of reality.

We live in the age where Jesus Christ Himself and God the Father Himself will come to us and make their home with us when the word of God is received in faith. The one who has my words and keeps them. How many times have we looked at it? He is the one that loves me.

You look at this lady who loves the presence of God so much that she makes this provision for the prophet. And because of that, because of her understanding, she receives her son back to life and she receives every possession that she lost during the famine back. The king acts on her behalf.

This is our opportunity. This is our exemplar. This is our template for glorifying God in our lives.

Glorify God in your body. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly by faith. This is a great, motivating picture for us.

Well, one thing that I have purposely under-explained, under-investigated is Gehazi. What is up

with Gehazi? This guy does a lot of running. What is up with Gehazi? Next time, and I think I'll be able to wait till Friday.

I think we can get back to Ephesians on Sunday and we'll do this next Friday night. This will be the title of the lesson. What's up with Gehazi? What is it with this guy? And we'll be moving into 2 Kings 5, 6, 7. And we're going to get Gehazi in the crosshairs.

We're going to pull him up. See what his... Because he is a very... You have to think for a servant. He's got to be one of the most prominent servants in the entire Old Testament.

And what a disappointment this guy turns out to be. So, we want to learn from the descriptions and the emphasis here on Gehazi. So, we'll pull him up and look at him at first blush next time.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how powerfully you encourage us, how over and over again you demonstrate to us your presence, your willingness to intervene and to act on our behalf. Your favor, your blessing, your provision that comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will keep us ever mindful of this. That our appreciation for the Lord Jesus, our appreciation for you, and our ability to reflect your glory through that appreciation will be a part of our lives every day from now until the Lord Jesus returns to collect us and take us to himself and to you. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.