

ELISHA

The Great Things That

problem. *“He said, Then bring meal”* (v. 41). He put some meal into the pot, and the *“harm”* disappeared from the stew. Again, the Lord met a need in response to Elisha’s faith.

One of the great prophets and miracle-workers of the Bible was Elisha. His ministry after the translation of his master Elijah covered over fifty years, and was marked by mighty evidences of the power of faith in God. Let us let our faith grow as we study what Elisha did.

Lesson #6:
Food Miracles

Scripture:
II Kings 4:38-44

Key Verse:
II Kings 4:44
“So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord.”

Hath Done

II Kings 4 is a chapter of miracles, isn’t it? Actually the ministry of Elisha was a ministry of miracles, and that’s why a study of his life is so helpful in encouraging us to exercise faith in a God of miracles! Verses 38 through 44 of II Kings 4 tell about two miracles performed through Elisha in a time of *“dearth in the land.”* The word *“dearth”* means *“famine,”* and we think this was the same famine mentioned in II Kings 8:1. There we read that Elisha told the Shunammite woman that *“the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years.”* The account continues in Chapter 8 to relate that the woman left the country for the seven years of famine, and then it tells us what she did when she returned to Israel. This is why the prediction of the dearth is recorded in Chapter 8 when chronologically it began in Chapter 4. Chapter 8 is about what happened at the end of the seven years! Anyway, during this seven-year famine, the prophets’ school at Gilgal (II Kings 4:38—Study again II Kings 2:1-5) ran into some problems with their food supply. But God was still fully able to supply their needs (Philippians 4:19), and Elisha was still confident in the mighty power of God to do the supernatural. Matthew 8:1-3 (Read it) reminds us that, with the Lord, the issue is never in whether He *can* do something, but rather in whether it is His *will* to do it. God can do anything!

I. “Death in the Pot” (II Kings 4:38-41)

Apparently there was a prophets’ school at Gilgal, just as there were at Jericho and at Bethel. This miracle began with Elisha teaching the Word of God and the students sitting down before him and listening (v. 38). At the end of his lecture the *“man of God”* called upon his servant to cook some porridge for everybody. The whole group of student prophets went out to *“gather herbs”* for the stew, and one of them accidentally got some poisonous *“gourds”* and *“shred them into the pot.”* When the porridge was poured into bowls for the young men to eat, they *“cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot”* (vs. 39-40). Elisha, as usual, knew the solution to the

(II Kings 8:4)

As in other accounts of Elisha’s work, however, we find here more than an accurate record of a miracle. This story gives us a symbolic lesson or illustration of a great spiritual truth.

- A. The account pictures the teaching of doctrine. *“Elisha came again to Gilgal. . . and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him. . .”*
- B. The mixture of truth and error produces *“death in the pot.”* We assume that most of what was sliced into the pot of stew was good, wholesome food, but the wild gourds shredded and put in were poisonous. A little poison poisons the whole pot. Really, a glass of milk containing *one drop* of cyanide is *more dangerous* than a glass of cyanide containing a drop of milk. No one would drink a glass of liquid that smells, looks, and tastes like poison or at least an unidentified chemical, but almost anyone might be interested in drinking what appears to be an ordinary glass of milk! A little error can make a sermon made up mostly of truth poisonous. Heresy in a critical point of doctrine can make a church that teaches a lot of truth into a false church. The Bible speaks in II Peter 2:1-3 of *“damnable heresies,”* false teachings that, if believed, would damn the soul! The Roman Catholic Church is supposed to believe and teach many Bible truths: the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His blood atonement, His bodily resurrection. But they also teach that men receive the salvation Jesus purchased on the cross for us through the sacraments of the church! This is a damnable heresy mixed in with a lot of truth. The “Jehovah’s Witnesses” movement claims to believe that the Bible is the very Word of God. However, they deny that Jesus is God in the flesh. Mixing truth and damnable heresy produces *“death in the pot.”* See what Jesus said about false doctrine in Matthew 16:6, 7, 8, 11 and 12. Mixing the leaven (yeast) of false doctrine with the flour of truth will produce a deadly loaf of bread.

C. The antidote to false doctrine is good teaching. When the sons of the prophets detected by the taste that something was wrong with the porridge, Elisha knew what to do. He called for some “meal,” and cast it in. Now the porridge was

Note:

edible. “*There was no harm in the pot.*” The Hebrew word translated “meal” in our Old Testament means just that: ground grain. It was used as food or in making some dish of food, as you can see in Genesis 18:1-6 and I Kings 4:22-23. Meal and oil provided food for Elijah and his benefactor in Zarephath for “many days,” as we see in I Kings 17:8-16. The Word of God is typified in food, especially bread, in the Bible (Matthew 4:4), and this symbolism certainly fits the spiritual message of this story. A dose of the straight Word of God is the cure for the mixed messages of false religion. We must be discerning when hearing a sermon, visiting a church, or considering a religious movement. We may find some good things, but is there “*death in the pot*”? Attend a church where sound doctrine straight from the Word of God is the only spiritual food you get.

**II. “Give the People, That They May Eat”
(II Kings 4:42-44)**

Now comes “a man from Baal-shalisha” with twenty loaves of barley bread and a bunch of “corn” (grain) for the young prophets to eat. This food from the field was offered as the man’s “bread of the firstfruits.” God had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should bring “the firstfruits of thy land” to “the house of thy Lord the God” (Exodus 23:19). The priestly tribe of Levi was to receive this tithe of the nation’s produce for their food (See Deuteronomy 18:1-5). It was to be brought to the house of God in “the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name there” (Read Deuteronomy 26) and offered in an act of worship, thanksgiving, and faith. Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, pronounced a divine blessing upon those who give God the first fruits of their income.

“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”
(Proverbs 3:9-10)

This good man was bringing God the firstfruits (his tithe) of the barley harvest, but notice that he did *not* take it to the House of God in Jerusalem. Perhaps we will think that the man was wrong, or ignorant of the command about this. The Lord worked in spite of the man’s disobedience or ignorance, we may say. However, it very well may have been that the King of Israel did not allow people to go to Jerusalem to worship (Remember I Kings 12:25-33). A godly person would not bring his tithe to the idolatrous temples at Bethel or Dan, and would be faced with the dilemma of what to do. Probably this man was giving the

firstfruits at the Gilgal prophets' school because he could do nothing else. God's ordinances make way for unusual circumstances when the heart is right. God's moral law cannot change, but specific details of His religious stipulations have and will be flexible for people who really want to do right (Study II Chronicles 30:1-20).

When the food came, Elisha said, *"Give unto the people, that they may eat"* (v. 42). Notice that the students and perhaps their families are called *"the people"* here and in verses 41 and 43. Again, the symbolism here is about feeding people the spiritual food of the Word of God. The Lord wants the people fed. Look up John 21:5-17, and study the passage carefully and prayerfully.

Notice in verse 43 that Elisha's *"servitor"* objected that a hundred men could not possibly be fed with so little food (apparently the loaves were small, only enough to feed one person each—v. 42). Of course, this whole situation reminds us of our Lord's feeding of five thousand (See Matthew 14:15-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-14). Remember the objections the disciples gave

when Jesus commanded them to feed the multitude.

"Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." (John 6:7)

"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" (John 6:9)

"We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people." (Luke 9:13)

The Lord commanded us to take His Word to all the people in the world, but Christians raise objections and think about the obstacles. Notice that the Lord Jesus had His disciples just go ahead and start feeding people with what little they had. That's what Elisha did on this other occasion some nine hundred years before.

"He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof." (II Kings 4:43)

God always has more power than we ever need to meet any situation. He is *"able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think"* (Ephesians 3:20). In getting the Word to the people, we need just to get started, and to trust God to meet the need. For Elisha, and for the Lord Jesus, God provided more than enough (II Kings 4:44 and John 6:11-13).