

# Bible Stories

## ELISHA

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19:19

February 18, 2023

Today we transition from the mission of Elijah to the mission of Elisha.

I have broken down Elisha's story into 8 vignettes:

- The mob and the 2 bears
- The widows oil
- The Shunamite woman
- Poison Food
- Naaman's Leprosy
- The floating axe head
- The blind army
- The Samaritan famine

### **The Mob and the 2 Bears – 2 Kings 2:23-24**

Previously, Elisha had performed a miracle on behalf of the people of Jericho by healing the water. Now he was on his way to Bethel (one of the locations of the golden calf worship), when a mob of young men came out from the town and began to mock him, ***“Go up, baldhead! Go up, baldhead!”***

This was not a random stunt by school children, this was an organized confrontation. Their chant, ***“go up, bald head”*** was a deliberate and malicious insult and implies that they would like nothing more than for Elisha to join Elijah – They wanted him to go away - into the next life preferably.

Elisha turned and pronounced a judgment on them in the name of Yahweh. 2 she-bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the young men.

Even though the mockery was aimed at Elisha, the real object of the mob's disdain was Yahweh, Himself. Bethel had once been a place of worship and communion with God, but had been turned into a place of calf worship and idolatry. God had ordained Elisha to be His mouthpiece and if He had allowed this sin to go unchecked, Elisha's ministry would have been effectively over. This terrible judgment affirmed that Elisha was Yahweh's chosen and that He would not allow anything to interfere with Elisha's mission.

- **Ellen White {GC 273}** - .... After this, Elisha had no further trouble in his mission. For fifty years he passed in and out of the gate of Bethel, and went to and fro from city to city, passing through crowds of the worst and rudest of idle, dissolute youth; but no one ever mocked him or made light of his qualifications as the prophet of the Most High.

### **Elisha and the Widow's Oil – 2 Kings 4:1-7**

A widow of one of the ***“Sons of the Prophets”*** came to Elisha with a problem. A creditor was coming to enslave her 2 sons as payment for a debt.

She informed Elisha that all she had in the house was a small jar of olive oil – not nearly enough to pay the debt.

Elisha told her to go to all her neighbors and borrow as many empty jars as possible - then go home with her sons, close the door, fill the empty jars with olive oil and set them aside.

The widow did as Elisha instructed. When all the jars had been filled, the oil from her one small jar stopped flowing.

The widow sold the oil, paid off the debt and lived off the residual income.

## **The Shunammite Woman – 2 Kings 4:8-37**

Elisha's travels often took him through the town of Shunem, in the tribe of Issachar. He was there so often that he became a regular guest in the home of a prominent woman and her husband. Eventually they constructed a small upper room for Elisha to use whenever he was in town.

Elisha was touched by the woman's generosity and instructed his servant, Gehazi, to inquire what could be done for her as a way of saying thank you. She said she didn't need anything, but Gehazi mentioned to Elisha that woman had no children. Elisha told the woman that at the same time next year, she would have a son.

Her response is interesting, she said, *"don't lie to me."* But, just as Elisha said, the next year the woman had a son.

The boy grew. One day he was in the field helping his father. Suddenly, he grabbed his head and said, *"My head, my head,"* before collapsing. The boy died and his mother laid him in Elisha's chamber and closed the door.

She and a servant raced to find Elisha. When she found him, she fell at his feet..... *"Did I ask for a son? No, I did not and now the boy is dead."*

Elisha instructed Gehazi to take his staff and run quickly to the where the boy lay and place the staff on the boy's face. Gehazi did as instructed, but the boy did not wake up.

When Elisha arrived, he went to the upper room and closed the door. He prayed and then he laid on the child putting his mouth, eyes and hands on the boy's mouth, eyes and hands – the boy started to get warm. Elisha paced the room then repeated his actions – this time the boy sneezed 7 times and opened his eyes.

Gehazi called the boy's mother and when she saw that the child was alive, she fell at Elisha's feet, then took her son and went out.

## **Poison Food – 2 Kings 4:38-41**

There was a famine in the land. One day, one of the sons of the prophets went out to find food for the group. He gathered wild herbs, vines and gourds and added them to the communal pot of stew. Unfortunately, he had failed to get his badge in wild plant identification because everything he had added to the pot was poisonous.

The stew was served and as the men began to eat, they recognized that they had a problem and went to Elisha, *"There is death in the pot, O man of God!"*

Now, normally we'd say just throw it out and start over, but remember there was a famine in the land and food – any food – was precious, so Elisha told them to bring him some flour. He threw the flour into the pot then said, *"Serve the people and let them eat."*

Everyone enjoyed the meal and no one experienced any ill effects.

## **Naaman's Leprosy – 2 Kings 5**

Naaman was a Captain in the Syrian Army. He was a man of great honor and valor ---- he was also a leper.

During a previous Syrian raid into Israel a small girl had been taken captive. She went into the service of Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, *"If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."*

Naaman went to the King of Israel with many gifts and a letter from the king of Syria.

When the King of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in despair. He had jumped to the conclusion that this was an attempt by Syria to pick a fight with Israel, so he sent Naaman to see Elisha.

As Naaman arrived at Elisha's house, Elisha sent a messenger to tell him to go wash in the Jordan river 7 times, after which he would be healed.

Naaman was a little put out, *"I thought you were going to come out of your house - call on the name of your god - wave your hands over me and BOOM I'd be healed! The rivers in Damascus are better than the muddy Jordan. Couldn't I just go home and wash in one of them?"*

Angrily, Naaman started for home, but his servants were able to convince him to do as Elisha had instructed. He was healed.

Naaman went back to Elisha's house and tried to give him all the gifts he'd brought, but Elisha refused. Gehazi, was listening.....

Naaman headed home. It didn't take long before Gehazi caught up and told Naaman that Elisha had changed his mind about the gifts because two needy young men had come to the house (Gehazi was lying). Naaman gave Gehazi 2 talents of silver and 2 changes of clothing then resumed his journey home.

Gehazi hid his loot and returned to Elisha's home.

When Elisha asked him where he'd gone, Gehazi denied having gone anywhere. Elisha knew exactly where Gehazi been and informed him, that because of his deception and greed, Naaman's leprosy would cling to him and his descendants forever.

When Gehazi left the presence of Elisha he was covered with Leprosy.

### **The Floating Axe head – 2 Kings 6:1-6**

The Sons of the Prophets living situation had become cramped, so they decided to do a little reno/remodel. They invited Elisha to go with them to cut some trees near the Jordan. He agreed to go.

As the group were hard at work, suddenly an axe head came off its handle and flew into the Jordan. Being iron, it immediately sank out of sight. This of course was a problem especially because the axe was borrowed.

The young man, who had been using it, was understandably distraught. Elisha asked where he saw the axe head land then cut a stick from a nearby branch and threw it in the water.

Immediately the iron axe head floated to the surface and was retrieved by the relieved young man.

### **The Blind Army – 2 Kings 6:8-23**

The King of Syria was making war plans against Israel and laid a trap for the King of Israel. Elisha told Joram of Syria's plan and he successfully avoided the trap. The King of Syria accused a servant of spying for Israel, but the servant denied the accusation, ***"We would never spy for Israel, but I'll tell you who the real problem is.... Elisha. He tells the king of Israel every word you speak – even from your bedroom."***

The King of Syria sent a vast army to Dothan to capture Elisha. They arrived at night and surrounded the city. In the morning Elisha's servant looked out the window and his knees began to shake:

**Servant:** *What are we going to do?*

**Elisha:** *Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them – 'O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.'*

Yahweh opened the servant's eyes. He saw, on the hills surrounding the town, horses and chariots of fire – a vast angelic army.

As the enemy approached the gates, Elisha prayed that blindness would fall upon them, then he went out to meet the blind army.

**Elisha:** *You are not on the right road, but if you follow me, I'll take you where you want to go.*

Upon arrival at their destination, Yahweh opened their eyes and they saw that they were INSIDE the walls of Samaria.

**King of Israel:** *Elisha what shall we do with them? Can I kill 'em? Can I? Can I? Huh, huh, huh?*

**Elisha:** *Don't kill them. Feed them and send them home.*

### **The Samaritan Famine – 2 Kings 6:24-7:20**

Sometime later, Ben-hadad, king of Aram, gathered his army and laid siege to Samaria. The siege lasted so long that the desperate people willingly purchased a donkey's head for 80 shekels of silver and 8 ounces of dove droppings for 5 shekels of silver.

Joram was walking the wall of Samaria one morning when a woman called out to him and told him the gruesome story of how she and a neighbor woman had eaten her son for dinner the night before.

The king tore his clothes in grief, but instead of seeking help from Yahweh he said, ***"May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!"***

Elisha was at home when the King's messenger came around. Elisha saw him coming and instructed that his door be closed and barred because, ***"the son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head – and the king is not far behind,"***

The messenger delivered his message: ***"Per the king - Surely this calamity is Yahweh's fault, why should I wait for Him any longer?"***

**Elisha:** *This is what Yahweh says: About this time tomorrow, at the gate of Samaria, a measure of flour will sell for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel.*

The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to Elisha, ***"You're kidding, right? Even if Yahweh opened the floodgates of heaven, what you are suggesting is impossible."***

**Elisha:** *You'll witness it, but you won't benefit from it!*

That's exactly what happened ---- In the morning a group of lepers ventured into the camp of the Arameans, but it was empty – Yahweh had caused them to hear the sounds of a great army and they had run away in the night. When the people heard the siege was over and that there was a camp full of food, they rushed the gates trampling to death the officer of the king.

### **What do we do with this story?**

Our tendency is to downgrade sin. Instead of calling it what it is, rebellion against God, we use words like, ***"mistake," "error," "slip," "flaw" or "failure"*** because those words don't sound nearly as harsh as ***"rebellion"*** and God knows we don't want to offend anyone..... It's like a meteorologist describing a category 5 hurricane as a light breeze so as not to offend those living at the shore.

We should see sin as God sees it – dangerous, destructive.... Offensive.

The sin of the mob was grievous because it was a direct affront to God, His authority and His chosen – very much like the wilderness rebellions against Moses.

The sin of Gehazi was grievous because he had been witness to the power of God at work through Elisha and his actions were a misrepresentation of God's character in the **FREE** act of healing Naaman – potentially leading Naaman to an understanding that God's grace and mercy can be purchased, manipulated or otherwise exploited – damaging his baby faith.

The sins of Israel were many and grievous which resulted in God removing His protection. The subsequent siege of Samaria was devastating.

But don't make the mistake of thinking that God delights in bringing judgments.

- **Ezekiel 33:11** - Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'
- **2 Peter 3:9** - The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Dispensing justice is necessary, but **Hesed** is voluntary - God does it because He wants to. It is the exercise of **Hesed** – loyalty, goodness, kindness, devotion, faithfulness, favor, mercy, unchanging love --- going above and beyond what is expected – that delights the God of the Universe and this is demonstrated in the rest of Elisha's story.

Oil flows, a dead son is restored to his mother, poison is rendered harmless, a leper is healed, an axe head floats, Yahweh's chosen is protected and a blind army is spared.....

What God delights in doing far out-weighs what He must do.