

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings

Lesson 15: Elisha's Mighty Works -- 2 Kings 3:1-4:44

Put yourself in Israel during the reign of Joram son of Ahab. The Northern Kingdom is spiritually wrecked. Ahab and Jezebel spent a generation planting Baal worship in Israel's soul, and while Joram removed the pillar of Baal his parents had erected, the text is blunt: 'He did evil in the sight of the Lord, though not like his father and his mother' (3:2). Less evil is still evil. The people of God are stumbling around in a landscape of half-hearted compromise, uncertain where the word of the Lord actually resides, unsure whether the God of their fathers is still speaking.

Into that world steps Elisha. Not with political power, not with an army, not with a compelling personality that could win a television audience. He steps in with the word of God and the works of God, and the combination is staggering. Water fills trenches in a waterless desert. A widow's last jar of oil multiplies until every borrowed vessel in the neighborhood is full. A barren woman conceives a son, that son dies, and Elisha raises him from the dead. A poisoned stew is healed. Twenty loaves of bread feed a hundred men with food to spare. Chapter after chapter, miracle after miracle, a single message is hammering into Israel's consciousness: God is here. God is speaking. God authenticates His servant. Do not abandon His word.

Notice what these miracles are not. They are not performances for a crowd hungry for excitement. They are not the result of a particularly advanced spiritual technique that the students of the prophets could learn and apply. They are God's direct intervention, sovereign and unilateral, given in a specific time of crisis to accomplish a specific purpose: to establish Elisha as the true prophet of the Lord in an era when Israel could not tell a true prophet from a false one. God was writing His endorsement in water and oil and bread and life, so that when Elisha spoke, Israel would know whose voice it was.

But there is something else here worth stopping over. These miracles are shot through with compassion. A widow about to lose her sons to debt slavery. A woman who had ached for a child and then lost him. A company of hungry prophets who accidentally poisoned their stew. Ordinary people in ordinary crises, and God attends to every one of them through His prophet. The God of these chapters is not distant and bureaucratic. He is close, attentive, and moved by the suffering of His people. Elisha's mighty works show us the character of a God who does not merely prove His power but lavishes it on those who need it most.

Group Discussion: Looking across the miracles in 2 Kings 3-4, what pattern do you notice about the kinds of people God helps through Elisha, and what does that pattern tell you about the character of God?

Personal Reflection: Which of the people in 2 Kings 3-4 do you most identify with right now, and what does the way God met them through Elisha say to your own situation?

Read 2 Kings 3:1–4:44

Study Questions

1. Read 2 Kings 3:1–20. When the allied armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom face disaster in the desert without water, Elisha is summoned. He calls for music, and the Spirit moves through him. He promises that the trenches will fill with water, not from rain but from God. What does Elisha's pointed refusal to acknowledge wicked Joram while honoring the presence of Jehoshaphat tell us about the conditions under which God's word comes, and what does the miracle itself demonstrate about God's faithfulness even when His people are led by compromised rulers?
2. The allied kings were in a crisis of their own making, a campaign launched without seeking God, yet God provided water because of the presence of one man, Jehoshaphat, who 'still inquired of the Lord' (3:11). Is there a place in your life right now where you have been operating on your own plan and find yourself in a kind of desert, and what would it look like to stop and genuinely inquire of the Lord as Jehoshaphat did?
3. Read 2 Kings 4:1–7. A prophet's widow is in debt, her sons are about to be taken as slaves, and she comes to Elisha with nothing but one small jar of oil. Elisha asks what she has in her house, instructs her to gather borrowed vessels, close the door, and pour. The oil multiplies until there are no more vessels. What does the way God worked here, through what she already possessed, through her own obedient action, and through borrowed vessels, teach us about how God typically provides for those who come to Him in genuine need?
4. The widow's oil stopped flowing the moment she ran out of borrowed vessels: 'when the vessels were full, the oil stopped' (4:6). The supply was not exhausted by God but limited by the widow's capacity to receive it. Where in your own life have you found that your capacity to receive God's provision was the limiting factor rather than God's willingness to give, and what might it look like to bring more 'empty vessels' of faith and expectation to Him?

5. Read 2 Kings 4:8–37. The Shunammite woman builds a room for Elisha and asks for nothing in return. Though her husband is old, she is given a son. When the boy dies, she goes to Elisha with urgency and remarkable composure, saying only 'It is well' to those who ask. Elisha prays and stretches himself over the boy, the boy is restored to life, and the woman receives her son again. What does the Shunammite woman's faith demonstrate about the relationship between genuine grief and confident trust in God, and how does Elisha's persistent, prayerful effort model the nature of intercession?
6. The Shunammite woman said 'It is well' while her dead son lay in the prophet's room, before she had any guarantee of restoration. She felt the grief fully, as the text makes plain (4:27), but she moved toward God rather than away from Him. When you are in genuine grief or loss, is your instinct to move toward God or away from Him, and what makes the difference?
7. Read 2 Kings 4:38–44. Two miracles close this section: the poisonous stew made wholesome by a handful of flour, and twenty loaves of barley bread feeding a hundred men with food left over. What do these two miracles share in what they demonstrate about God's power over both death and scarcity, and why do you think God worked through Elisha in such tangible, physical ways among the community of the prophets?
8. The feeding of a hundred men with twenty loaves prefigures Christ's feeding of the multitudes (Matthew 14:13–21; John 6:1–13), the same impossible arithmetic, the same incredulous servant, the same surplus, the same word of the Lord bringing abundance from scarcity. How does recognizing God's consistent character across both Testaments, always generous, always more than enough, shape the way you trust Him in your own areas of scarcity?

9. Looking across all of 2 Kings 3:1–4:44, these miracles were given in a specific era of deep apostasy when Israel desperately needed to know whose voice was the voice of God. Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 1 Corinthians 13:8–10. How do the miracles of Elisha function as God's authentication of His prophet and His word in that era, and why does the church today rest on the completed and confirmed New Testament rather than on continuing miraculous sign-working as the basis for its confidence in Scripture?
10. Looking back over the whole sweep of 2 Kings 3–4, from the water in the desert to the bread that fed a hundred, name one specific truth God has shown you about His character through this passage, and describe one concrete step you intend to take this week in response to it.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Exodus 16:1–18, where God provides manna in the desert and the supply exactly matches the need; 1 Kings 17:7–16, where Elijah's parallel miracle of the widow's oil and flour anticipates Elisha's multiplied jar; John 6:1–14, where Jesus feeds five thousand with five loaves and two fish and the crowd recognizes Him as the coming Prophet; Hebrews 1:1–2, where God's speaking through prophets in many ways is fulfilled and surpassed in His Son; 2 Timothy 3:16–17, where Paul declares the completed Scripture fully sufficient to equip the believer for every good work

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