

Elisha: Seeing the Hand of God at Work

Session 3

May 11, 2025

*God's Hand in Meeting Others' Needs*

**The Point:** God blesses as we serve others.

**Session Passage:** 2 Kings 4:8-17,32-37

## **2 Kings 4:8-10**

**Connection to the Point.** A Shunammite woman sought to serve Elisha by providing food and lodging.

**Shunem** (v. 8). The town of Shunem was located about twenty miles southeast of Mount Carmel and about fifteen miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. The town is mentioned only two other times in the Old Testament. Shunem was located in the territory given to the tribe of Issachar (Josh. 19:18). It also appears in the account of King Saul consulting the witch at Endor. After the Philistine army camped at Shunem, Saul sought counsel from the dead prophet Samuel by means of a medium (1 Sam. 28:3-19).

**Prominent** (v. 8). The Hebrew is most often translated “great” and can refer to greatness in any sense. In this instance it indicates the woman being of great wealth and social status. The word is also used to describe God’s creation of the sun and the moon (Gen. 1:16) and the “large” sea creatures (v. 21). God promised Abram He would make the patriarch’s name “great” and make him into a “great” nation (12:2). The word is also used to describe less positive things such as “severe” plagues (v. 17), “enormous” guilt (20:9), and loud lamentations (50:10).

**Persuaded him to eat** (v. 8). In the ancient Near East, hospitality was considered to be a sacred duty. Strangers were to be welcomed into one’s home and provided with food, shelter, and protection. This practice developed due to the nature of the society’s nomadic lifestyle. The hospitality of strangers was necessary because public inns were few and far between; therefore, travelers had to depend on the generosity of strangers. Hospitality was to be extended to all people, even one’s enemies. In this instance, hospitality was extended to Elisha to such an extent that the couple constructed a room in their home where the prophet could stay whenever he was in the area.

**A holy man of God** (v. 9). In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, to be holy is to be set apart from the rest of the world. While holiness is often ascribed to God because

of His complete moral uprightness, God is also holy in the sense of His perfection in all aspects of His being. That Elisha was a holy man of God did not mean that Elisha was morally perfect, but rather that Elisha was set apart by God to do the work of God.

**Upper room** (v. 10). The typical Israelite house was known as the four-room house. It was constructed of either stone or mud brick and had two stories. The lower level consisted of three parallel rooms in the front of the house with a broad room in the back of the house. The second floor could repeat one, two, or three of the rooms of the lower level with a rooftop courtyard taking up the remaining space. Stone and wooden stairs, and even ladders, provided access to the second story. It has been suggested that the primary living space was on the second floor, with the rooms of the lower level being used for storage, work spaces, and even as a stable for animals. In Scripture, upper rooms are the location of some significant events. After the death of his son Absalom, David mourned in an upper room above the city gate (2 Sam 18:33). Ahaziah, king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, died of injuries suffered from falling out the window of his upstairs room (2 Kings 1:2, 16-17). Jesus and His disciples celebrated Passover in an upper room before Jesus's crucifixion (Luke 22:12). After Jesus's resurrection and ascension, the disciples were staying in an upper room (Acts 1:13-14).

## **2 Kings 4:11-17**

**Connection to the Point.** The Shunammite woman gave birth to a child, a blessing she had not expected.

**Attendant** (v. 12). The Hebrew term translated *attendant* has a broad range of meaning. The term can refer to a personal attendant, household servant, or follower. It is used of the young boy Samuel when he served the priest Eli at the tabernacle of the Lord in Shiloh (1 Sam. 2:11). In both Samuel and Eli's relationship and in the relationship between this attendant and Elisha, the roles seem to be like that of a master and an apprentice. The word can also refer a person who is young; this wide range of meaning encompasses an unborn child (Judg. 13:5), an infant (Ex. 2:6), a child just weaned (1 Sam. 1:24) to a youth or teenager (Gen. 22:12; 37:2), or an individual of marriageable age (34:19).

Attendants performed a variety of functions. They could serve kings or princes (1 Sam. 20:40) as soldiers or mercenaries (21:1-6; 2 Sam. 2:14), or armor-bearers (1 Sam. 14:1,6). Some served wealthy households (9:3-10). They could work as cooks (Gen. 18:7), porters (22:3), field hands (Ruth 2:9), and personal attendants (Judg. 7:10-11). Some were stewards of estates. In the New Testament, this role of a steward is seen in the parable of

the talents when the master going on a journey entrusts all his possessions to his servants to manage in his absence (Matt. 25:14-30).

**Gehazi** (v. 12). The servant to Elisha, Gehazi was an individual of questionable character. In one instance, Gehazi testified to a king of Elisha's deeds, assisting a widow in getting her lands restored (8:1-6). However, most of his actions showed him to be selfish and faithless. He attempted to drive away a woman who had sought Elisha's help because her son had died (4:27). After Elisha had healed Naaman of a skin disease and the prophet had refused a reward, Gehazi went to Naaman and took the reward for himself and then lied to Elisha (5:19-27).

**Say to her** (v. 13). The reason for Elisha communicating with the woman through his servant, Gehazi, is not explicitly stated. The prophet may have done so for cultural reasons—the use of an intermediary may have been expected due to her prominent social status or because of their being different genders. Or Elisha may have used Gehazi in this instance to make the woman more comfortable. Speaking to the prophet's servant rather than to the prophet himself may have allowed the woman to speak more openly and plainly about her needs. Another suggestion is that Elisha was intentionally using Gehazi to speak to the woman in order to provide an opportunity for his servant to be involved in Elisha's ministry.

**Trouble** (v. 13). The Hebrew word for *trouble* in this passage is often translated "fear," "trembling," or even "terror." In this instance, however, the usage of the term in relation to its meaning is debated. One suggestion is that after encountering God in the person of the man of God, the woman was moved by reverence (holy fear) for God to take great action in response to the encounter. Elisha believed the woman's actions and sacrifices on his behalf significant—they had cost her something. Without being asked, the woman and her husband had constructed a room for Elisha and furnished it (vv. 9-10). The woman's sacrifice recalls Jesus's words concerning a widow who gave all she had in a sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple (Luke 21:1-4).

**Commander of the army** (v. 13). The reason as to why a *commander of the army* would have been able to help the woman is not clear. One possibility is that this phrase may be a reference to a military governor who would have had power and influence to help the woman. The references to both the king and the commander of the army suggest that Elisha had significant influence in the royal court.

**Living among my own people** (v. 13). It is not immediately clear why the Shunammite woman reported that she was living among her own people. One suggestion is her response indicates that she was content and secure in all she possessed so as to be in need of nothing. Another possibility, related to her not having a son, is that she was professing her faithfulness to the Lord, the people of God, and the plan of God. In other words, she had not chased after the false gods who promised fertility—like Baal. Later, the woman’s situation would change, and she would be in need. After the time of a famine when she had lived in another country as a resident alien, she was in need of having all she had possessed prior to the famine restored to her (8:1-6)

**She has no son** (v. 14). Having no son in the ancient world was a somber and serious predicament. Having no son meant a couple had no heir and therefore no one to carry on their family name and legacy. Furthermore, this situation meant that the couple had no son to assist with the day-to-day work and would have no one to care for them in their old age. Furthermore, barrenness carried a stigma and was often looked upon as a curse from God. In the Old Testament, barrenness was an issue for Abram and Sarai (Gen. 15:2-3) as well as Elkanah and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1-2), A New Testament example is the parents of John the Baptist—Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-7). In all these cases, God eventually provided a son for each couple.

## **2 Kings 4:32-37**

**Connection to the Point.** The Shunammite woman trusted the prophet of God, and God responded by resuscitating her son.

**Context.** Just as Elisha had promised, God gave the Shunammite woman a child (vv. 16-17). However, the son who had been miraculously born suddenly died (vv. 18-20). The mother hurried to Elisha and reminded him of the promise that he had made to her about having a son (vv. 27-28). Elisha sent his servant, Gehazi, to the dead boy. Elisha gave Gehazi his staff and told him to put it on the boy’s face. However, no miracle occurred; the boy remained dead (vv. 29-31). The mother did not go with Gehazi but remained with Elisha (v. 30)—seemingly having faith that if God was going to work a miracle He would do so through Elisha.

**Prayed** (v. 33). Elisha is consistently called the “man of God” throughout the biblical account of his life. Elisha’s status of being the man of God did not mean, however, that he had powers that were intrinsic to himself. In fact, the reality of the situation was quite the opposite. As “the man of God,” Elisha knew that for him to undertake work for the kingdom

of God he would need the power of God. Therefore, to heal the woman's son, in faith Elisha sought God and His power.

**Lay on the boy** (v. 34). Some have tried to argue that Elisha's actions were an example of CPR being used in the ancient world. However, the text presents this event as a miracle, not the result of human interaction. Elijah acted in a similar manner in his resuscitation of a widow's son (1 Kings 17:21).

**Went into the house** (v. 35). The boy's mother had laid his dead body on the prophet's bed in the room that had been made for him, most likely in the hopes that Elisha would return and perform a miracle (v. 21). Elisha's bed was in one section of the house with one entrance. The other section of the house (with a separate entrance) was the family's main living area.

**Paced back and forth** (v. 35). Elisha exited the room where the boy was laying, entered the main house, and paced back and forth. While the text does not explicitly state the reason for his actions, the prophet may have been praying and therefore waiting for God to answer his prayer. He also may have been troubled that the boy's flesh had merely become warm rather than the boy fully returning to life. It may seem odd to us that Elisha would be worried or troubled. He was a prophet. However, the Bible is full of people of faith who at times doubted the power of God. In fear Abraham told the Egyptians that his wife was his sister (Gen. 12:10-20); Moses made excuses for why he could not lead God's people (Ex. 4:10-17).

The New Testament details Thomas's doubts (John 20:24-29) and even says that some of Jesus's disciples experienced doubts after He had been raised from the dead (Matt. 28:16-17). Like all other miracles and acts of God, the miracle performed in this account was not based on the depth or strength of Elisha's faith. The miracle to revive the boy was based on the power and plan of Almighty God.

**Sneezed seven times** (v. 35). The number *seven* signifies fullness and completion. It plays a significant role in Scripture—from beginning to end. In Genesis, God created the world in seven days, with the seventh day being set apart as holy (Gen. 1:1–2:3). The book of Revelation is written to seven churches (Rev. 1:4), and the number seven appears fifty-five times in the book. That the boy sneezed seven times was an indication that he was once again fully alive and healthy. This event also indicates that it is God alone who has the power over life and death.

**Bowed to the ground** (v. 37). In the ancient Near East, prostrating oneself until the forehead touched the ground expressed great reverence, humility, and/or gratitude to a superior or benefactor. The woman was expressing her thankfulness and reverence toward God by bowing to the man of God.

**Parallel to Elijah.** There are similarities and differences in the miracles God performed through the prophets Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37). In the case of Elijah, the woman was a widow; in Elisha's case the woman was married. Both miracles occurred in upper rooms. Both involved raising a dead son. The content of Elijah's prayers is detailed, where as it is just noted that Elisha prayed. Both miracles involved the prophet laying on top of the dead body. The miracle in Elijah's case happened immediately, whereas in Elisha's case it occurred in two stages. In the Elisha account, the prophet's attendant was sent ahead but was unable to raise the boy, whereas only Elijah himself was involved with his miracle. Finally, both boys were presented to their mothers alive, and both women acknowledge the men as prophets of God. The woman verbally acknowledged that Elijah was a man of God, while in Elisha's case the woman fell at his feet and bowed before him.