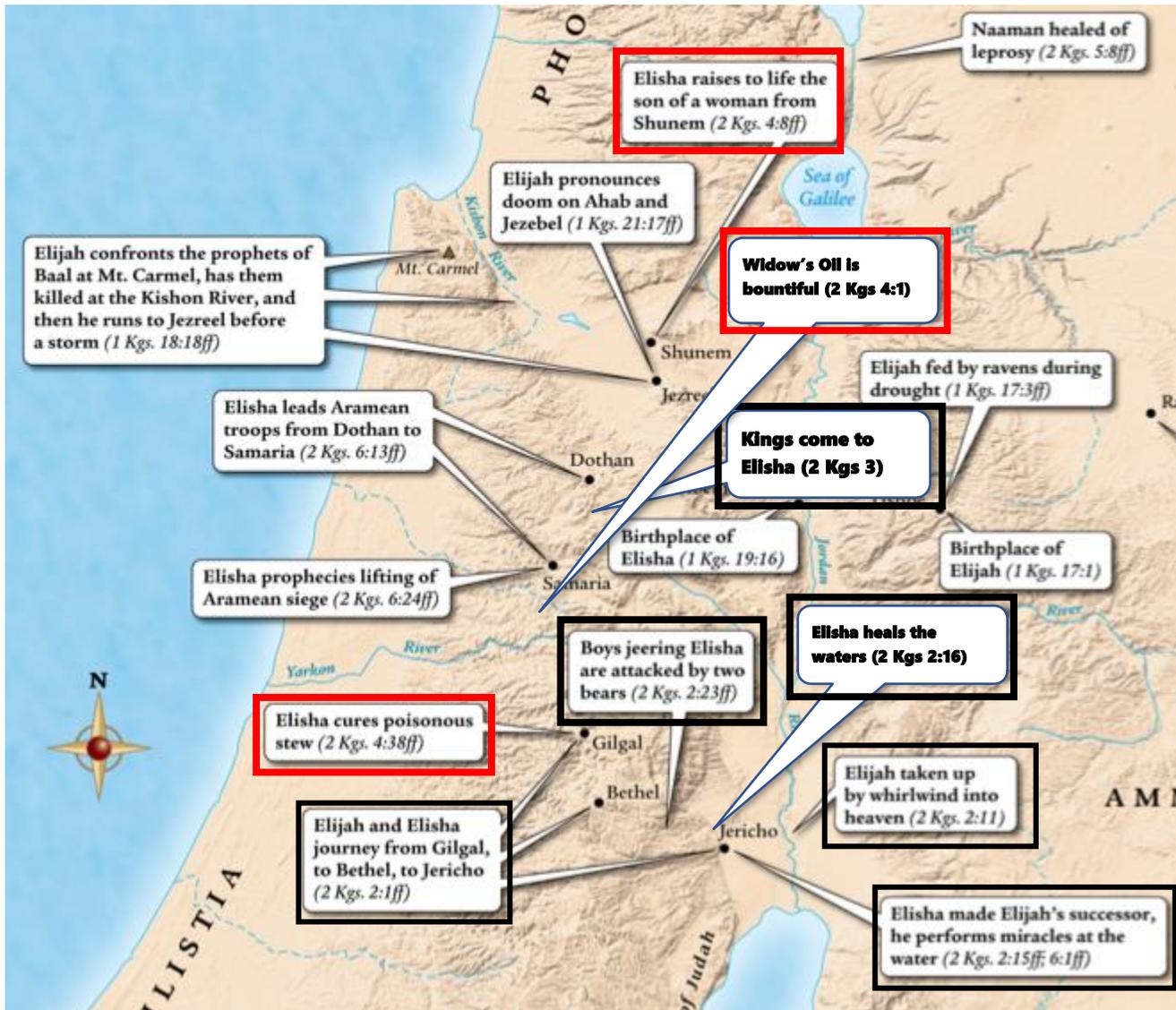


Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. (Psa 115:11)

Today we will continue our investigation into the life and acts of Elisha, seeking patience and comfort from these things that have been written for our learning

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Rom 15:4)



We go from a miracle that was on a very public stage with the rescuing of the armies of Israel and Judah to much more private and smaller scale affairs. The scope doesn't change the import of Elisha's actions, though, as we'll see.

There isn't really any indication of timeline here. It could have been days or months after the digging of the ditches, but the order of the descriptions, if they are indeed chronologically supplied, indicates the travelling of the prophet throughout the land, ministering not just in one place, but in many. Ministers of God go where they are

needed, they are not interested in staying static and bound to a single place if it doesn't meet the need. Remember the state of affairs in these days, too, where idolatry was rampant and the priesthood was lodged in ritualism. There was no Aaron or Phinehas on the scene as a strong, teaching High Priest, and the prophets were on the scene to fill in that gap. In the pattern of Elijah, Elisha goes from place to place, performing miracles and being the ambassador of God.

We take up his acts here

“Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.” (2Ki 4:1-7)

The work of God's servants doesn't always come from visions or inspiration from the Holy Ghost. Sometimes, His people have pressing needs that require attention. Here we have a widow and mother who was married to one of the sons of the prophets, in very dire straits. She cries to Elisha. This isn't just a passing request; it is a cry of despair and distress.

We don't know the particulars of how her husband died or how they incurred such debt that her two sons were to be taken into the debtor's custody to work it off, but in her distress, she went to the one place she knew she could get relief – the Lord, through His servant. She doesn't ask for an answer she has already contrived, she simply lays out the problem, hoping that Elisha has some answer she hasn't thought of or he can make inquiry of the Lord on her behalf. This appears to be a pious woman, one who served God with her husband, recognizing their role as servants.

I think it should be noted that while there is urgency in her request for help, there isn't complaint. This is factual information she brings to Elisha, not drama. Elisha replies to her in kind – I can't do anything for you, either at the law or by my own hand.

But here again we see a test of her faith and her recognition of Elisha's being God's prophet, through her willingness to follow instructions that in the flesh make no sense. An impoverished soul looking to the flesh for relief will grasp at anything. One looking through the eyes of faith will not.

Elisha's response is very straightforward – what is it you think I can do for you? He can't change the law, he can't undo the debt or the fact her husband is dead. He does the only thing he can – he looks to the Lord and what He has given the widow. He doesn't make a show of it, he keeps things simple – what is here that could be used? We must use what God has given to its uttermost, operating with stewardship.

For me, this is reminiscent of Jesus feeding the multitude

“And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.” (Mar 6:35-44)

This is a tremendous example of simple and complete trust – the Apostles didn't know what Christ intended to do, but they dropped their logistics-minded approach and did as He commanded. The widow did the same. She came to Elisha in faith trusting that he – and through him the Lord – was going to do all he could to aid her, and whatever he said to do was adequate to the task. She didn't try to out-logistic, out-plan or out-execute her situation.

The widow obeyed. Her son obeyed. How much simpler can this example be? When we obey, the Lord hears us and He hears His servants in their work to aid us.

As she and her sons go about the business they are directed to conduct, quietly, behind their closed door, they are rewarded for that obedience and are provided exactly what is needed to satisfy the debt and relieve the pressure applied by their creditors.

This might be the most important element of this event. The oil flowed from the pot until there was enough to sell and pay the debts. The widow wasn't made wealthy out of this, and she didn't try to manipulate the situation with some so-called pragmatism, sending her sons out to sell oil and come back with the empty vessels for another round. She simply followed the instruction and trusted relief was forthcoming.

This event is one of the most amazing examples of God providing for His people in both its practicality and simplicity – serving as a tremendous example for us to learn from.

- The Lord provides for His own precisely what is needed at the time they need it. Patience and faith is required for us to wait upon those provisions and to not abuse them when received.

Next we look to another event highlighting the relationship Elisha had with the people and with God

“And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.” (2Ki 4:8-17)

We see here again that Elisha is engaged in traveling throughout the land attending to the business of ministering. It is clear it was a regular occurrence “...this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually”. He is familiar and well known to the people, doing his job.

This is a drastically different situation than what Elisha last dealt with. A destitute and desperate widow before, here in Shunem a “great woman”. She was a woman of wealth and means, a rare one who recognized one of God's servants and valued him.

God puts His servants into all stations and walks of life, and while the wealthy are rarely found among those ranks, on occasion they are. She serves as a rare example of someone who has resources and remembers that she ought to put them to the best possible use – helping God’s servants. She doesn’t just operate as though she is her own entity, she rightly involves her husband in the engagement, even though it appears he may not be as faithful as she.

It is a simple thing she does to provide for Elisha that doesn’t come with any strings attached. She provides him simple lodgings and creature comforts which give him great relief in his travels, seeking no benefit. This is a rare and great example of proper charity toward the elect.

Even when pressed on how Elisha can repay her, the Shunammite turns down his offers to put in a word for her with the king, replying “I dwell among mine own people” – she’s saying that she’s content with how she dwells and seeks no favor from Elisha – she performed a reasonable service. Again, a remarkable example of simple self-sacrifice in the service of God. This is not a small matter, remember

“For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.” (Mar 9:41)

- There is no better use of the resources we’ve been given by God than to use them to provide aid and comfort to His servants, and there is no shame in receiving those gifts.

Elisha of course calls on the Lord to gift the Shunammite woman a child, which He grants. But just because the Lord grants us a thing, even a thing we didn’t ask for, does not mean it won’t be a means of testing

“And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill,

she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me? Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.” (2Ki 4:18-37)

This is such a heartbreaking scene to me. The woman didn't ask for the child, but was so thankful for him, and clearly loved him dearly. To have him taken from her in such a sudden manner was shocking, to say the least. We have so many of these precious and fragile little ones in our midst, that the event is easy to relate to and hopefully likewise to emulate in our own times of distress.

Notice carefully the Shunammite's reaction. She doesn't despair, she doesn't set about wailing, she doesn't utter a careless word or make an ill-advised oath. She seeks out the one source of help she knows of. There's no panic in her, but orderliness, setting the child in Elisha's chamber so that no one would know of his death until she had engaged the Lord. Asking leave of her husband to go, she gets down the road. At no point is there anything but orderliness in her approach, up to and including her response to Gehazi – “it is well”.

For those who are patient in waiting upon the Lord and content in His will being done in earth as it is in heaven, even such a trauma as this generates the belief that “it is well”. All things are well for us when we walk in the faith that God has ordered all things, even those that seem difficult and troublesome. Regardless of whether He has ordered them to accomplish something in us, for us, through us for another or simply to progress His timeline, it is for His good pleasure it is done and accomplishes His purposes. Amen and thank God for that.

I think also that her answer to Gehazi was very purposeful – he had no known communion with the Lord and was not a present help. His serving Elisha didn't endow him with any powers or connection, and she was not there to file a complaint. She was there to know the will of the Lord in this matter, and Elisha was the only one who could potentially enlighten her. She wished to understand why this child, whom she had not asked for, had been taken – what was it she was to understand and learn from God in this affliction? That is very different from a complaint; take note that she doesn't even mention the child's passing, Elisha discerns it.

Elisha also points out a thing that is crucial for us all to remember

“...the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.”

Unless the LORD tells us a thing, we simply will not and cannot know it. The prophets were not magical men able to summon the knowledge of God, all-knowing mystics or wizards. They were men whom God blessed as vessels for His communication. If He chose not to tell them a thing, they didn't know the thing; when He wanted them to know a thing, nothing could stop that knowledge from taking hold. Likewise, if the Holy Ghost does not help us to understand a thing, we will not understand and it will be as if we were blind, unable to see what is right in front of our own eyes. We must be ever thankful for every bit of light and understanding we receive from our Father.

Elisha sends Gehazi with his staff to lay it upon the child, I think not because he held some strange belief that laying the rod on the child would be to any avail, but precisely because it wouldn't. You'll notice that there is one thing the Shunammite does not do in her faithful behavior – lift her voice to God in prayer herself. I perceive that there is some level of superstition going on here that Elisha is seeking to diminish. He is trying (I think) to make the point there is no miraculous virtue or power in him explicitly that would raise the dead child. His rod won't do it, his mantle couldn't do it, only God can do it. Even in a faithful person it is easy to lose sight of where the real power lies.

I will point out that there are differing opinions on this from various expositors. Some think this is an almost petulant move by Elisha, and not only a testing of the mother's faith but his as well, basically making the point to him that he couldn't send another to do his job – thus the mother's refusal to go with Gehazi. I have difficulty with this analysis given he had clear affection toward the woman and his going with her wasn't seen by him as an imposition, as well as his acknowledgement he wasn't given insight into the matter by God. While I won't rule out a momentary lapse in his faith, the way he behaves when he gets to the Shunammite's home isn't faithless. Others argue that he was delegating the task to Gehazi because he didn't believe the child to actually be dead. This seems possible, but still questionable to me.

We then see Elisha emulating a proven pattern shown by Elijah when he raises the widow of Zarephath's child (see 1 Kgs 17). He enters the chamber alone, cries unto

the Lord and stretches himself upon the child. This isn't a matter of rote behavior, but a recognition in Elisha of a pattern that was executed by Elijah.

Here we see in Elisha another example for us – follow the proper patterns set out by those of faith before you. Where new light doesn't exist, don't try to walk by the light of your own sparks. Progressiveness is not a thing in the church of God.

Elisha's prayer is not immediately answered. We have no right to expect that simply because we make an earnest inquiry and petition of the Lord that He will answer it on our timeline. That is the exercise of faith, to wait upon the Lord

“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.” (Psa 27:14)

We see the patience and faith of Elisha tested here, but like the Shunammite, he is careful not to let his lips betray him while he paces the house waiting on an answer from God. It is instructive to consider that even the great prophets had to wait on the power of the Lord, because it was not theirs to simply use. Compare this with

“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.” (Joh 11:43)

Lazarus was called forth with a command, these children were raised by repeated supplication. This is a strong reminder to all God's people that even if conducting a miracle, it is in His name, not directly with His power.

The Shunammite and Elisha provide us at least one more lesson here – perseverance. When we are given a thing by God, it is God who must maintain it – in other words, it is still His to take away. So the Shunammite experienced and I believe understood. She had been refreshed and encouraged by this gift and would have it back. She was not persuaded off her task by her husband's doubting, the difficulty of the journey to get to Elisha, Gehazi's interference, Elisha's (possible) delegation and reluctance to immediately come see to the child or the difficulty of what it was she asked. Elisha was not discouraged by the surprise of the event or the lack of immediate answer. He believed he would be answered and held fast until he had an answer, like Jacob

“And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” (Gen 32:26)

- There is no requirement that we pray for a thing once and if nothing seems to come of it immediately stop. We are told to “pray without ceasing” (1 Th 5:17) and sometimes that means multiple times for relief or deliverance from a thing. Making supplication to God is not something to let up on and must be constant if we are to

demonstrate our faith, regardless of station, strength of faith, upbringing, or any other condition in our lives.

Next, Elisha travels to Gilgal, where he clearly spends regular time. He's a man who is not sedentary, staying in his own four walls as it were. Though he clearly held routine services at Carmel, per the Shunammite's regular visits, he was a man who went where souls needed him to be. His return is during a time of dearth

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot. And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD.” (2Ki 4:38-44)

Elisha comes to Gilgal to teach the sons of the prophets and minister to them. He doesn't ignore their temporal needs while teaching, requesting a meal be prepared. One of the young men tasked with helping is careless in his selection of items for the meal and selects a gourd unknown to anyone. This has always been curious to me, how you could find a plant that is unknown by anyone and assume it is edible, but also that anyone would allow that mystery plant to be used in the pottage is odd. But this is a time of dearth and carelessness isn't surprising.

When we are in an extreme place, the flesh can be careless. In this terrifying situation where the gourds poison the food, God has placed the means of not just one but two miracles. Elisha heals the food just like he healed the waters at Jericho, with a seemingly benign action – adding meal to the pot. There is no antidotal potency to corn or barley meal, and it was likely already in the pot of food. This was another act of faith on Elisha's part that the Lord had given him the means to resolve this matter.

Then we see a very interesting little event. Most people tend to focus on Elisha's healing the death in the pot and spend little time on what the Lord does for His servants suffering in the dearth by providing plentifully for their need. The wonderful gift

of barley loaves and corn is from the first fruits, a very fitting gift to the prophet of God, who very fittingly gifts them to his students and friends.

After watching his master work a great healing miracle with the pottage, when Elisha tells the servitor to put these gifted barley loaves and ears of corn in front of a hundred or so people, he questions the command. He sees this with the flesh, from a practical perspective – a dozen loaves of bread can't possibly feed one hundred or more.

Elisha did have knowledge that the servitor didn't, though. Elisha tells him "... *thus saith the Lord*". To me this is wonderful insight into the reality of these prophets. Elisha wasn't a free agent doing these things. He reminds the servitor of that here, as if to say – "I'm not acting on my own, the Lord has said this will be enough, as he has promised"

"I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." (Psa 132:15)

Even in this dearth, the Lord is actively taking care of His people, and He has told Elisha it will be enough. The discussion is a little reminiscent of this exchange:

"When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?" (Mar 8:19-21)

It is always a difficult thing to let go of our view of "reality" and trust that the Lord will truly do a thing. But here again we see Him do just that. Elisha's faith is realized, and the Lord's power is shown through him in sight of the whole school of prophets, that their faith might be strengthened as well. Elisha doesn't send his servant out on a contingency "just in case" grocery run. The Lord said it would be more than enough, and he believed it. This is a powerful example.

- Trust in the Lord is the only hope out of trouble. When in need, whether saving from immediate danger or daily bread, trust through faith is the only hope of gaining what will fill the needs we have. We must be examples to each other in this, always.

Next time, Lord willing, we will examine more of Elisha's life and his wonderful works, seeking learning and wisdom from them. Until then,

"Peace be to [you, my] brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph 6:23)