

## 4. Only by God

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When we are astounded by something, we are quick to say, "It's a miracle." However finding a parking spot close to the WalMart entrance, that can not be considered a miracle. I get the feeling that we use the word 'miracle' way too loosely.

Here is the definition of 'miracle' from a dictionary: "such an effect or event manifesting or considered as a work of God." It is in the supernatural realm, not something mere humans can manufacture. Besides, if it happens all the time, it wouldn't be called a 'miracle', but 'regular'.

By the way, why do we try to explain away a miracle? What do we prove? If it can be explained with our logic, that wouldn't be considered a miracle, because the concept of a miracle itself is going against our logic. Certainly not that we're smarter than God. Either we believe in a God who can do all things, or we don't believe anything that God did in the Bible, like other non-believers.

*Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*  
As I have said before, if we can believe the first verse of the Bible, the rest of it is a cake walk.

Certainly there's room for honest questions about the nature of the miracles. But for Christian believers, there's never room for questioning the reality of God's miracles.

This morning we get to study the five miracles that happened in the northern kingdom Israel by God through His prophet Elisha. In my opinion, other than Jesus Christ, the Bible records about the miracles done through Elisha more than anyone else.

### A. PROVISION FOR A WIDOW'S FAMILY

*2 Kings 4:1-7 A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves." 2 So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, 1) what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil." 3 Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—2) empty vessels; 3) do not gather just a few. 4 And when you have come in, 4) you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones." 5 So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. 6 Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased. 7 Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest."*

The legal system in ancient Israel would not allow her to declare bankruptcy. Though it sounds inhumane, the creditor was within his right to enslave the debtor and his children until they pay the debt or the Year of Jubilee came.

There are four things I want you to notice in God's miracle:

**1) God often begins His miracle with what we already have.**

Moses had a rod in his hand, and the Lord used that to accomplish great things. Jesus used a child's lunch to feed 5000 men and their families. All that the poor widow had was a little oil in a jar. But with God, a little is enough to do wonders.

**2) God pours out His blessings of miracles to the ones who are empty to receive.**

The vessels had to be empty before they could be filled with oil. It did no good to bring the widow full vessels. When we are full of ourselves, we cannot be filled with the Spirit of God fully, because we get in His way.

**3) God delivers His miracles to His servants in ways that they exercise their faith.**

If the widow and her sons thought they only needed 10 Tupperware containers, those were the only things they would get. God is more than willing to fill us to the brim with His blessings, but it is we who often limit Him with our unbelief.

**4) God's miracle is not a show or circus.**

Some TV evangelists make so-called 'Miracle Crusades' as promotions for their own ministries with selfish gain in their hearts. If the truth be known, they really cannot show that it was the Lord who genuinely performed miracles. God alone should receive all the glory through His miracles, no one else.

The Lord doesn't always perform miracles of this kind to help us pay our debts, but He does meet our needs if we trust and obey. Don't expect God to pay off your credit card bills after you run them up to the max by buying silly things. It doesn't work that way.

By the way, wouldn't it be nice if the Lord provides us with free gasoline like this?

**B. A SON FOR A BARREN WOMAN**

*2 Kings 4:8-10 Now it happened one day that Elisha went to Shunem, where there was a notable woman, and she persuaded him to eat some food. So it was, as often as he passed by, he would turn in there to eat some food. 9 And she said to her husband, "Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly. 10 Please, let us make a small upper room on the wall; and let us put a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lamp-stand; so it will be, whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there."*

*2 Kings 4:14-17 So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Actually, she has no son, and her husband is old." 15 So he said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. 16 Then he said, "About this time next year you shall embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord. Man of God, do not lie to your maidservant!" 17 But the woman conceived, and bore a son when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her.*

Shunem was located about 18 miles east of Mount Carmel where Elisha often traveled. Obviously, this Shunammite woman's home was in the path of Elisha's frequent journey. This unnamed woman wanted to prepare a 'prophet chamber' for Elisha because it was her way to giving back more to the Lord.

The stigma associated with barrenness was harsh in the ancient world in that region. My mama was kicked out of her first marriage because she couldn't have a child.

When she remarried my daddy, she had two children without any problem. In many cases, even though it was not women's faults they were the ones who received the blame for barrenness.

As a return of her kindness, Elisha told her that she would have a son. It sounded very much like God's words to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 17. God's grace brought life where once there had been no life. You may think, "Having a child can not be a miracle." Yes, it is in this case, because they would not have a child otherwise. Only God can make this happen.

### **C. LIFE RESTORED TO THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON**

*2 Kings 4:18-22 And the child grew. Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers. 19 And he said to his father, "My head, my head!" So he said to a servant, "Carry him to his mother." 20 When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. 21 And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him, and went out. 22 Then she called to her husband, and said, "Please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and come back."*

*2 Kings 4:27-37 Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet, but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me." 28 So she said, "Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" 29 Then he said to Gehazi, "Get yourself ready, and take my staff in your hand, and be on your way. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him; but lay my staff on the face of the child." 30 And the mother of the child said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So he arose and followed her. 31 Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, "The child has not awakened." 32 When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. 33 He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. 34 And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out on the child, and the flesh of the child became warm. 35 He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. 36 And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite woman." So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Pick up your son." 37 So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.*

We don't know why the child died. But when she faced this terrible tragedy, she turned to the man of God who had contact with Him.

Did you notice that Elisha was surprised that God didn't reveal why this Shunammite woman was in deep distress? It is because Elisha was so in tune with the Lord that he knew the heart of the Lord. We get surprised when we know His heart. Oh, how I wish that all of us were so in tune with our God's heart that we may do everything for His glory!

How can we get to know His heart? By seeking Him daily through His Word, the Bible and praying according to His will. There is no such thing as an instant super Christian. We have to work at it. The more we spend time with Him through His Word and prayers, the deeper we get to know His heart. There is no shortcut.

Elisha was led to do the exact same thing like his mentor Elijah as it is mentioned in 1 Kings 17 to revive this child. He had great faith in God to raise the boy from the dead.

Do not think that the method of Elisha to raise this child from dead has anything to do with homosexuality. Many homosexual so-called pastors and priests use this kind of Bible verses to justify their ungodly lifestyle, as they use the friendship between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20. That would be totally out of context.

It was not the method or staff or prophet that brought life back to the boy but God.

As only God's grace can impart life, whether to a dead womb or to a dead boy, only God's grace can impart spiritual life to the dead sinner. It was God who gave the boy life, but He used Elisha as the means to do it. So it is with raising sinners from the dead. God needs witnesses, prayer warriors and concerned believers of God to bring that life to them.

#### **D. THE PURIFICATION OF THE POT OF STEW**

*2 Kings 4:38-41 And Elisha returned to Gilgal, and there was a famine in the land. Now the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets." 39 So one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, though they did not know what they were. 40 Then they served it to the men to eat. Now it happened, as they were eating the stew, that they cried out and said, "Man of God, there is death in the pot!" And they could not eat it. 41 So he said, "Then bring some flour." And he put it into the pot, and said, "Serve it to the people, that they may eat." And there was nothing harmful in the pot.*

During the famine, there was not a whole lot to eat. They made a pot of stew with whatever they could find in the field. I don't know what they saw in the stew to scream, obviously there was something bad. They put some flour in the pot as Elisha said and it became a good stew.

Do you know that the Israelites still make this stew with the same recipe they used? They say it is a family secret recipe, but now they call it "Prophet Goulash" and it is even recommended by Martha Stewart.

There was nothing inherently purifying in the flour Elisha put in the pot. The real purification was a miraculous work of God.

#### **E. FEEDING THE 100**

*2 Kings 4:42-44 Then a man came from Baal Shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain in his knapsack. And he said, "Give it to the people, that they may eat." 43 But his servant said, "What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?" He said again, "Give it to the people, that they may eat; for thus says*

*the LORD: 'They shall eat and have some left over.'” 44 So he set it before them; and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.*

In the northern kingdom of Israel, there was no official temple dedicated to Jehovah God, and many of the faithful priests and Levites had left apostate Israel and moved to Judah. Since there was no sanctuary to which the people could bring their tithes and offerings, they brought them to the ones who shared the true repository of godly faith in Israel.

When I read this portion of the Scripture, it reminds me how Jesus fed the multitude. As a matter of fact, the more we study about the life of Elisha we will notice that his life typifies the life of Jesus. Don't get me wrong, Elisha was not Jesus. His life reflected the grace and love of Jesus.

Let's admit that we all want to see and experience miracles of God. But we should not seek after miracles, but the miracle Giver – Jesus Christ.

We need to remember that as much as we long for miracles, however, they are not a cure-all. Remember what happened to Peter during Jesus' trials? He had witnessed Christ perform hundreds of miracles, including His incredible Transfiguration. If glimpses of the supernatural strengthen faith, Peter's should have been ironclad. Yet, when he denied the Lord three times, his faith folded like a house of cards.

Remember, God doesn't owe us any miracles. He doesn't need to do anything to prove His greatness. He has already given us an incredible display of His power in His creation. He has made the ultimate sacrifice to purchase our redemption. Through His power, He has conducted the most miraculous transaction known to mankind – He brought us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

## **F. APPLICATIONS**

### **1) God still makes miracles.**

Don't let any denominational theologian tell you that God's miracles no longer happen in the 21st Century.

### **2) God chooses to use people to bring His miracles, not because He needs us, but because He chooses to include us.**

He wants us to be a part of His plan. Would you like to be used by Him for His glory? If so, just make yourself available.

### **3) God often starts His miracle with what we already have.**