

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 2 KINGS 1-4

It's been said, "God's workmen come and go, but God's work continues."

That's what we find in tonight's chapters – a transition takes place. Elijah, the prophet, passes on the baton of ministry to his protégé, Elisha.

But that's not the only transition we encounter tonight...

Remember where we are on the historical timeline. King Ahab was killed at the end of 1 Kings. In his place his son, Ahaziah, reigns over Israel in the north.

And the Moabites take it as an opportunity to throw off the Israeli yoke.

Verse 1 "Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab." Moab had been under Israeli control since the days of David. But Israel has weakened and they see the death of Ahab as their opportunity to regain their own independence.

"Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured..." Perhaps Ahaziah was taking a stroll on the roof of his palace, and fell through the skylight. How it happened we're not told, but it was an awful tumble.

"So he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury." The new king is laid up in the ICU. He has contusions and a concussion. He's wondering if he'll walk again.

But guess where he turns? He falls again! This fall is more devastating than the first. He sends messengers to the Philistines, to inquire of their god, Baal-Zebub.

It's interesting, at Mount Carmel, Elijah revealed the impotence of Baal of the Sidonians, but there were dozens of Baals. Remember we talked last week about the pagan belief in local deities. "*Baal*" means "*lord*". And many of the false gods of the Middle East were called "*Baal*". Every community had their own Baal.

Evidently, Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, had rejected the Baal of the Phoenicians, but instead of turning to the true God, he worshipped the Baal of the Philistines.

It's interesting, "**Baal-Zebub**" means "**Lord of the flies.**" (This is the name Jesus called Satan in Matthew 12). Flies of course, carry disease. So whenever plagued with a mysterious illness pagan people were tempted to call on the God of the flies.

Ahaziah's messengers are on their way, when God sends His messenger to intercept them. "**But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?' Now therefore, thus says the LORD: 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'**" God is a jealous God. He's insulted when His people seek wisdom from other gods...

This is also how God feels when we run to the gods of this age for help.

How does the church justify turning to worldly consultants for spiritual wisdom? How do we justify putting our trust in a secular counselor who doesn't know God?

*Do we not have a God who is able to supply us all the wisdom we need?* I believe God's Word and God's Spirit - is totally sufficient to meet all our needs. God will provide us peace of mind, emotional healing, and soul satisfaction.

“So Elijah departed. And when the messengers returned to him (King Ahaziah), he said to them, "Why have you come back?" So they said to him, "A man came up to meet us, and said to us, 'Go, return to the king who sent you, and say to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'"

Ahaziah gets angry. He asks in verse 7 “Then he said to them, "What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?" So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist."

And the king knows immediately... "he said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite."

Elijah was a hairy guy. I picture him with bushy hair and scraggly beard. He was like John the Baptist – the antithesis of fashion, and style, and opulence.

Verse 9 “Then the king sent to him a captain of 50 with his

50 men. So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!' " But Elijah proves a little more difficult to arrest than they first thought. Ahaziah is not the only thing that falls in this chapter.

“So Elijah answered and said to the captain of 50, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50.” They get torched!

Hey, you always *get burned* when you fight against the will of God.

Verse 11 “Then he sent to him another captain of 50 with his 50 men.

And he answered and said to him: "Man of God, thus has the king said, 'Come down quickly!" So Elijah answered and said to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men." And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50.” God doesn't like the job the police force is doing so *He fires them* all. Fiery judgment falls from heaven.

Now just in case any of you think this might be a good way to deal with your enemies let's remember what Jesus told James and John. When the Samaritans refused to let Jesus pass through their territory, the hot-headed disciples wanted to duplicate Elijah's miracle. In Luke 9:54 they ask Jesus, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Eljah did?”

*Let's fry them!* There have been times when I've wanted to fry an enemy...

But Jesus rebuked them, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.”

Elijah had a ministry of judgment, but 2 Corinthians 5 gives to us a different ministry. Believers in Jesus have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Our job is not to call down fire from heaven, but to extend God's mercy and forgiveness.

Often times we too have forgotten “what manner of spirit we are of...”

Always remember, *Elijah never saved anybody*. At the end of his ministry *Elijah goes to heaven in a fiery chariot... Jesus goes to a cross*. As Christians we're not disciples of Elijah. We are of a different spirit... You and I are followers of Jesus.

We need to call down fire from heaven, but not on other people – on ourselves.

The fire we need to seek is the fire of Pentecost. Let's call down the fire of the Holy Spirit – *the fire that purifies, and fuels, and forges, and burns away the cords of bondage*. When God says, “*Well done good and faithful servant*” we want it to be a description of a godly life, not the degree to which a sinner's been cooked.

Verse 13 “**Again, he sent a third captain of 50 with his 50 men.**” Captain One ended up a crispy critter. Captain Two commanded a barbequed battalion.

This third captain changes his approach. “And the third captain of 50 went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him: "Man of God, please let my life and the life of these 50 servants of yours be precious in your sight. Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up the first two captains of 50s with their 50s. But let my life now be precious in your sight." Captain Three doesn't want a 3-peat. He wises up...pleads for his life.

“And the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king.” The Captain of 50 was more Elijah's prisoner than Elijah was his prisoner. “Then he said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word?

Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'" Elijah stands toe to toe with the king and pronounces God's judgment. As we've pointed out Elijah was a man of courage and faith.

“So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken.

Because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.” And here the tracking of the history gets confusing. Both kings in Judah and Israel are named “Jehoram.”

“Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of

Israel?" 2 Chronicles 20 mentions Ahaziah.

Understand life is not just a race – it's a relay race. And the winning team in a relay isn't necessarily made up of the fastest or strongest runners. You've got to be able to make a clean pass. If you can't pass the baton you won't be a winner.

This is what we need to realize about Christianity.

So what if I love the Lord, and know His Word, and walk in His ways if I can't pass off my faith to my kids, and my friends... then I can't say I've won the race.

In chapter 2 Elijah departs from this earth, but before he does he passes the baton to Elisha. "And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" Elisha sensed that Elijah was about to be taken to heaven. He's about to lose the man he's followed for 10 years. He's not going to abandon him now.

"So they went down to Bethel. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

"Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they

came to Jericho.’ Understand what’s happening here...

Elijah knew the rigors and hardships that come with ministry. Elisha did too. For 10 years he’s served alongside Elijah. Serving the Lord is no walk-thru-the-park.

Before he’s taken to heaven, Elijah goes on a final stroll that’s designed to test Elisha’s calling. He walks from Gilgal - to Bethel – now to Jericho – and on to the Jordan River - and at each stop Elijah gives Elisha the option of staying behind.

Remember, before being Elijah’s disciple, Elisha had been a successful farmer. All along this last lap, Elijah gives Elisha the opportunity to bow out gracefully, slip away, and return home to his former occupation. But each time Elisha agrees to push on. He reaffirms his commitment to press on in the ministry to the finish.

“Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So the two of them went on.” Elijah is passing on the baton, and Elisha is passing the test. “And 50 men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan.”

Elijah was *THE prophet of all the prophets*. The “sons of the prophets” were apprentices. They were still in prophet school. Everyone knows a monumental transition is about to occur.



The Junior Prophets are standing on the bank to witness what happens. *Billy Graham is about to ordain his successor.*

Verse 8 “Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.” Notice, Elijah includes Elisha in on the miracle. The waters part supernaturally, and they both walk through the riverbed on dry ground.

And Elijah says to his sidekick. “And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?” Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.”

This is a marvelous request. Elisha had seen enough to become well aware of his own inadequacy. He knew that *God’s work* is always done by *God’s Spirit*.

In fact, he knew he would need twice the anointing of the Holy Spirit that Elijah had enjoyed. He asks for a *double-dip – a double-scoop - of Holy Spirit power*.

And that’s exactly what he gets! Elisha ministers 50 years – 850-800 BC - twice as long as Elijah. He also does twice the number of Elijah’s recorded miracles.

Elisha not only inherits Elijah’s ministry, but takes it to new heights.

But there’s a contingency. “So (Elijah) said, “You have asked a hard thing.”

“Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.” Elisha’s double portion is contingent on him seeing Elijah’s lift-off. It was necessary for the younger man to continue to the end.

Only a man willing to walk in Elijah’s footsteps could be trusted with his power.

And this is a lesson for us. We all want the power demonstrated by godly men, but are we willing to cultivate the godliness and endurance to handle that power?

Verse 11 records Elijah’s blast-off. “Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”

Imagine, a twister sweeps down and sucks up Elijah. Inside the wall of wind there’s a real-life chariot of fire that swoops down and knocks Elisha back.

The vehicle that fetches Elijah was pulled by horses – *maybe a Mustang*.

We get the idea God sent a heavenly limo to fetch Elijah, but what happens is far more profound. Ezekiel 1 records his vision of God’s throne, and Ezekiel sees it sitting on the back of angels or cherubim... It’s a mobile throne – a throne-chariot.

We know the Ark of the Covenant was a type of God’s throne, but 1 Chronicles 28:18 refers to the Holy Ark as a “chariot”. Psalm 18:10 tells us God “rode upon a cherub... and flew upon the wings of the wing...” I believe the fiery

chariot that escorted Elijah to heaven was none other than the throne of the living God.

God revved up his throne, and came personally to take Elijah to heaven.

This makes Elijah one of only two men in the Bible who never died.

Who was the other man to escape death? Genesis 5:24 tells us, “**Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.**” Revelation 11 speaks of two men who appear on earth to testify of Jesus. They’re killed by the antichrist - then resurrected by God. Some people hypothesis these two are Elijah and Enoch.

Of course, the New Testament speaks of a group, yet future, who’ll never die? Any guesses? *The church alive at the rapture...* I’m expecting to be one of them.

Verse 12 “**And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces.**” It was a sign of astonishment.

“**He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan.**” When Elijah was caught up to heaven his mantle – or the coat of the prophet – fell to earth. It was his symbol of authority.

“**Then (Elisha) took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him...**”

I like what David Guzik says, “**The mantle did not fall from**

heaven and rest on Elisha's shoulders - he had to *decide* to pick it up and put it on. Elijah's ministry was one of great power, but it came with great pressure and responsibility."

"And (Elisha) struck the water, and said, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?"

And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over." Elijah's last miracle became Elisha's first.

The prophet smacks the water with his mantle, and the river splits. Elisha now knows that the God of Elijah will be his God and work miracles through him.

There are many similarities between Elijah and Elisha, *but there were also several notable differences*. Elijah's miracles revealed God's fiery judgments - Elisha's conveyed God's grace. Elijah's first miracle turns off the water. God shut the heavens. Elisha's first miracle heals the waters of Jericho.

It was the same spirit on Elisha that rested on Elijah, but the same Spirit worked in a different way through the two men. We'll find the same to be true of God's work in us. Each of us will have our own style and emphasis. You may be a *fiery Elijah*, or a *laid back Elisha* – but the same Holy Spirit will use both types.

"Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. Then they said to him, "Look now, there are 50 strong men

with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send anyone." Elisha knew his teacher hadn't been dropped off on some mountain. He was obviously in heaven.

But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, "Send them!"

Therefore they sent 50 men, and they searched for three days but did not find him." The search party comes up empty. "And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go'?"

Elisha begins his ministry in Jericho and the town owes him a debt of gratitude.

Go to Jericho today and you can drink of fresh spring water. It wouldn't be the case, if not for Elisha... "Then the men of the city said to Elisha, "Please notice, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the ground barren." And he said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it."

So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the source of the water, and cast in the salt there, and said, "Thus says the LORD: 'I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness.'" Elisha puts salt in a new bowl – a *simple additive* - and takes it to the spring that feeds the town's water supply.

Rather than pick out the poison, Elisha neutralizes it with the

salt.

This is what Jesus does in us. His cure is simple – *His love and grace* – but what always makes revolutionary is where it's added. God casts in the salt at the headwaters of life. He adds *His love to our nature*. He purifies the spirit - the spring that feeds all the other areas of our life - our thoughts, plans, ambitions, and deeds.

Jesus changes the whole man by cleaning up the spring...  
“So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke.”

Verse 23 is an interesting story. “Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, “Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!” Evidently, Elijah was a hairy man, but Elisha was just the opposite. He was as bald as a bowling ball.

“So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths.” You might say it was a grizzly judgment.

First, let me share a few thoughts in defense of Elisha...

Don't think he was jumping on preschoolers. The word translated “*youth*” was used of Joseph at 39 years old. It refers to an older youth. Here's what happens here... A gang of smart-elect teenagers start hassling the prophet of God.

And don't think they weren't just mocking Elisha. Elijah was hairy. They were pointing out Elisha's baldness. They were

denying Elisha's God-given calling. *"He has no right to take over where Elijah left off. He's not the prophet Elijah was."*

And it doesn't say they died. They may've got away with just cuts and scrapes.

It's clear though Elisha would not have the patience to be a good youth pastor.

His group would end up bear feed – picnic baskets for Yogi. *Of course, if Elisha was your youth pastor you would think twice before toilet papering his yard...*

Hey, the real lesson here is to be careful what you say about a person who's serving the Lord. When you roast the pastor over Sunday lunch - or laugh at the bald spot on top of his head - or make fun of his inability to tell a joke... *watch out for the wild bears!* I've got a man-eating Labrador Retriever at home...

Seriously, no one is above legitimate criticism - but make sure your critique is over valid and biblical issues. Picky, trivial criticisms are *unbearable* to God.

Verse 25 **"Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria."** It's interesting to me when he leaves the area of the Jordan the first place Elisha visits is Mount Carmel – the site of Elijah's greatest victory.

Perhaps Elisha went there for *inspiration* and *preparation*.

In chapter 3 Israel, Judah, and Edom team up to fight against the Moabites. When the allies run out of water, Jehosphaphat, king of Judah, caalls for Elisha.

“Now Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned 12 years.

And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not like his father and mother; for he put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin; he did not depart from them.” Jehoram was the second of Ahab’s sons to be king.

He was evil, but not as big a blasphemer as his parents, Ahab and Jezebel.

“Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheepbreeder, and he regularly paid the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. But it happened, when Ahab died, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.”

So King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel.”

In 1868 a German missionary, FA Klein, discovered a bluish, basalt stone - 4’ x 2’ x 14” thick. It was found in the Moabite city of Dibon, 20 miles east of the Dead Sea. It dates to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. Today, it’s on display in Paris at the Louvre.

It’s an ancient monument called the Moabite Stone, or the Mesha Stele. It basically describes the facts of 2 Kings 3, but from a Moabite perspective.

And it confirms conclusively the historical reliability of this chapter.

Mesha rebels against Israel. Jehoram musters an army.



Verse 7 "Then (Jehoram) went and sent to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?"

And he said, "I will go up; I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." Then he said, "Which way shall we go up?"

And he answered, "By way of the Wilderness of Edom."

"So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they marched on that roundabout route 7 days..." The journey to Moab is through the Judean wilderness. Thus, "there was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them. And the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the LORD has called these 3 kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?" Jehoshaphat was a godly king. He seeks the Lord.

"And one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah." In other words, was a servant and understudy to Elijah. He is a prophet of God.

"And Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

Then Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother." The prophets of Baal.

Elisha is being sarcastic. Jehoram was an idolater. He worshipped the golden calves of Jeroboam. Why is he now running to Yahweh in a time of trouble?

“But the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the LORD has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab." And Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you, nor see you.

But now bring me a musician." Then it happened, when the musician played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.” This is such a provocative detail.

Hey, Elisha is seeking guidance from God so he calls for a musician.

The prophet knows it's when he *fills the room*, and *fills his heart* with worship - that's when God speaks to him. Psalm 22:8 tells us, *God inhabits the praises of His people*. Praise creates an atmosphere which is conducive for God to work.

Next time you need to hear from God approach Him with praise and worship!

Verse 16 “And he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'Make this valley full of ditches.'

"For thus says the LORD: 'You shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you, your cattle, and your animals may drink.' "And this is a simple matter in the sight of the LORD; He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand. Also you shall attack every

fortified city and every choice city, and shall cut down every good tree, and stop up every spring of water, and ruin every good piece of land with stones." Elisha tells the soldiers if they'll dig ditches God will fill the ditches with life-saving water, and lead them to victory.

Here's a lesson. Our job is to dig the ditch. God then fills the ditch. *We can't fill them, and God won't dig them.* In every work of God there's *our part* and *His part*.

If we're trusting God to add to our congregation - let's buy some chairs.

If you're believing God to deliver you from alcohol - clean out the fridge.

If you're asking God to supply a mate - don't be afraid to go out on a date.

Don't pray for water, if you're unwilling to dig a ditch for God to fill.

*"But I'm in the desert. There's no water. I'm faint from thirst. I don't feel like digging..."* Hey, this is where we miss God's blessing. Faith is not a feeling. Faith is hearing the Word of God and acting on it despite the external circumstances.

I liked Charles Spurgeon's comments on this story. He writes, *"The way of faith and the road to the blessing is this: God promised it – we will get ready for it."*

Verse 20 *"Now it happened in the morning, when the grain offering was offered, that suddenly water came by way of Edom, and the land was filled with water."*

Like Elisha predicted, the armies didn't see rain, but rains

fell in the distant mountains, and sent flash floods to fill the valleys and trenches that they dug.

“And when all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to bear arms and older were gathered; and they stood at the border. Then they rose up early in the morning, and the sun was shining on the water; and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood.

And they said, "This is blood; the kings have surely struck swords and have killed one another; now therefore, Moab, to the spoil!" The Moabites had never seen a bed of flood water in the wilderness. Their battle plan was based on an optical illusion. They charged the armies thinking they were in disarray.

“So when they came to the camp of Israel, Israel rose up and attacked the Moabites, so that they fled before them; and they entered their land, killing the Moabites. Then they destroyed the cities, and each man threw a stone on every good piece of land and filled it; and they stopped up all the springs of water and cut down all the good trees. But they left the stones of Kir Haraseth intact.

However the slingers surrounded and attacked it.

And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him 700 men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not. Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall; and there was great indignation against Israel. So they departed from

him and returned to their own land.”

The Moabites worshipped Molech, and Molech-worship involved the evil of child sacrifice. To solicit the help of his god the king of Moab offered his heir on the altar. For whatever reason, when the Hebrews see the horrible, hideous heinous act taken by the king they lift their siege and return home.

Chapter 4 records 4 more of Elisha’s miracles... It’s sort of a “*Best of Elisha*”. We’ll look at the first two miracles this week, and the last two next week...

“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.”

This is a desperate situation. The poor woman has just lost her husband, and now her sons are about to be sold into slavery. And you think you’ve got it tough.

At least the credit card company isn’t coming to sell you kids as slaves.

“So Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” In other words, do you have anything of value? “And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.” She’s got no jewelry - no I-Pod - no 401K - no expensive china. The only item of worth that belongs to this woman is a single jar of olive oil. The woman is *broken* and *broke*.

“Then he said, “Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from

all your neighbors - empty vessels; do not gather just a few." Borrow as many containers as possible.

“And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones.” That must’ve sounded like a strange command. *Did he not hear me? I’ve only got a little oil?*

Verse 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. 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.”

This was a miracle of multiplication. As the widow pours her olive oil from her one jar she discovers God has given her an endless supply. The oil doesn’t cease to flow until her son announces in verse 6, “There is not another vessel.”

Guys, what a lesson! God’s blessings are endless. His grace is a well that never runs dry. *Our limitation is never His willingness, but our lack of faith.*

In Scripture oil is a type of the Holy Spirit, and the lesson here is obvious. As long as we keep coming to God as an empty vessel – void of our selfishness and pride - He’ll be faithful to fill us with His boundless blessing – His love and joy.

God only stops His blessing when there are no more empty vessels to fill.

In verse 7 she reports to Elisha, "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."

"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.

And she said to her husband, "Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly. 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 lampstand; so it will be, whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there." And it happened one day that he came there, and he turned in to the upper room and lay down there.

Here's a couple with the gift of hospitality. They notice Elisha travels a circuit. They set up a guest room, so when he passes through he has a place to stay.

In verse 12 Elisha wants to return the favor. "Then he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite woman." When he had called her, she stood before him. And he said to him, "Say now to her, 'Look, you have been concerned for us with all this care. What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?'" She answered, "I dwell among my own people." So he said, "What then is to be done for her?"

And Gehazi answered, "Actually, she has no son, and her husband is old."

So he said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. Then he said, "About this time next year you shall embrace a son." It was in May, 1982 that Kathy and I attended a pastors' conference in Ohio. We were trying to have a child, and Kathy asked some other ladies for prayer. As they prayed one of the ladies spoke a prophecy, "About this time next year you shall embrace a son."

Nearly the same words Elisha spoke to this woman. And to make a long story short, Zach was born May 29, 1983. God is still working His miracles today.

Notice how the woman responds. *Look at her great faith!* "And she said, "No, my lord. Man of God, do not lie to your maidservant!" She doubts his promise.

Verse 17 "But the woman conceived, and bore a son when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her. And the child grew."

Fast-forward several years... "Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers. And he said to his father, "My head, my head!" So he said to a servant, "Carry him to his mother." When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died." Perhaps he had a brain aneurism, or a sudden stroke. In a matter of hours his headache turned to death.

"And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him, and went out." She laid the corpse of her son on Elisha's bed.

"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."

"So he said, "Why are you going to him today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath." And she said, "It is well." Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, "Drive, and go forward; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you." And so she departed, and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

So it was, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to his servant Gehazi, "Look, the Shunammite woman!. Please run now to meet her, and say to her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?' "

And she answered, "It is well." Apparently, this woman's faith had grown.

How would you have answered these questions under similar circumstances?

**"Is it well with you?"** Of course not, I've lost my son. My heart is broken. I'm dying inside. How can you ask me if I'm *well...* when I'm going through *hell*?

**"Is it well with your husband?"** Are you kidding? The man is a brick. He's so caught up in his work he has no clue as to what's going on with his son or me.

**"Is it well with the child?"** How cruel and crude? He's not well, he's dead.

That's what I would've said. But notice to each of these three questions the woman answers, **"It is well."** This woman refused to focus on her circumstances. *Her outlook was*

*based on her uplook!* It was well because she believed in God.

Verse 27, “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.” So she said, “Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, ‘Do not deceive me?’” Now Elisha understands what’s happened.

“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. 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.” Elisha returns with the woman.

“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.” This is what people say when they want to see the Senior Pastor... *“I dealt with your staff and nothing happened.”*

I believe there’s an important lesson here typologically or idiomatically. The staff represents the Mosaic Law. Moses was identified with his shepherd staff.

Legalism – the observance of rules and rituals – were

impotent to help the boy. The staff failed to give life. 1 Corinthians 3:6 reminds us, “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” The Law sentences us to death. And if the staff represents the law, then Elisha speaks of the One who came after the Law, Jesus Christ.

Verse 32 “When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. 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. 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.”

Elisha lays on the corpse. He identifies Himself with the dead child – mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands on hands... It’s as if his life is transferred to the boy.

And this is exactly how Christian conversion works. The dead are raised to life through identification with Christ. In Romans 6, Paul says when Jesus died on the cross we died with Him. We were crucified with Him. Through faith we are transposed onto His crucified body. When He died to sin, we died to sin.

Likewise when He rose, we rose with Him. Just as the breath, and warmth, and life of Elisha radiated into the boy - Jesus breathes into us. He transfers to us His vitality. This is how we’re made alive spiritually - Jesus shares with us His

life.

Here's a picture of Christian conversion... the boy sneezes 7 times and his eyes are opened. Repentance is like a sneeze. It's violent. It shakes you up!

There's a sudden expulsion of dirt and debris. It's like the confession of sin.

Then faith opens blind eyes. I love this... He sneezes and his eyes open.

**“And (Elisha) 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." So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.”**

Tonight let me ask, *is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with your children?* Don't look to circumstances, look to the power of God.

It is well! God wants to do a work in your life and in your family this week.