

# Elisha, a Shepherd of Kings and People

2 Kings 3:1-4:44

Key Verse: 4:43

**“How can I set this before a hundred men?” his servant asked. But Elisha answered, ‘Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: “They will eat and have some left over.””**

In today's passage we see how Elisha served as a shepherd for kings and people in Northern Israel. Their spiritual and moral condition was very dark. They needed a shepherd who could lead them to God. God raised Elisha as such a shepherd. Our times are also dark. We need shepherds in every segment of society. God wants to raise us as shepherds for his people (1 Pe 5:2). Let's learn from Elisha how to be shepherds for his people.

## **I. Elisha, a shepherd of kings (3:1-27)**

Verses 1-3 tell us about Joram, another evil king in Northern Israel, who succeeded Ahaziah. Seeing the terrible result of Baal worship, Joram got rid of the sacred stone. It was not out of reverence for God, but out of fear of disaster. He still clung to the sins of Jeroboam to maintain his power. The background of chapter 3 is a war between Israel and Moab. Verses 4-7 tell how this war broke out. After Ahab's death, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel, causing him great economic loss. So Joram decided to again subdue the Moabites. He mobilized all Israel and invited the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, along with the king of Edom, to join his military campaign. They wanted to surprise the Moabites by approaching from the south, through the Desert of Edom. Their strategy seemed good. But they could not find water. Without water, they were in deep trouble. The soldiers were too thirsty to fight effectively. Horses were unable to carry riders or to pull their battle chariots. The joint army was paralyzed and helpless.

In this desperate situation, there were two responses. In verse 10 the king of Israel said, "What! Has the Lord called us three kings together only to hand us over to Moab?" He became very negative. He felt the joint army had already lost the war. He was very fatalistic. Indirectly, he blamed God. In ordinary times, he might have appeared strong. But in this adverse situation, he was defeated before fighting. It was because he had no faith in God. However, Jehoshaphat was different. He said, "Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord through him?" He believed that it was time to come to God in prayer. He believed God would help them in the time of need. He was in the same situation, but his response was different. It was because he had faith in the Lord. It is very easy for us to be

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like Joram and to feel defeated before fighting in the time of difficulty. But we learn from Jehoshaphat that we must seek the Lord and his servant at such times.

Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What do we have to do with each other? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother" (13). The king of Israel should have acknowledged his sins and humbled himself. Instead, he virtually blamed the Lord, saying, "No, because it was the Lord who called us three kings together to hand us over to Moab." This aroused Elisha's holy anger. He said, "As surely as the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you or even notice you. But now bring me a harpist." As a resident of Northern Israel, it was dangerous for Elisha to talk to the king in this way. But he had a clear identity as a servant of the Lord Almighty. He was willing to rebuke the king, when the king was not right with God. At the same time, Elisha respected the faith of Jehoshaphat. He knew that God was willing to intervene in the war because one king had faith. But Elisha had to overcome his holy anger to hear the word of the Lord well. He needed music therapy (1 Sa 10:5). Sometimes, in order to listen to the voice of God, we need to overcome anger, bitterness, a busy mind, or stress. So the Bible teaches us to sing and listen to spiritual songs (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16b).

"While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha, and he said, 'This is what the Lord says: Make this valley full of ditches. For this is what the Lord says: You will see neither dew nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink'" (15a-17). This was beyond reason or common sense. They needed to accept the Lord's word with faith. Faith is to believe that God will do what he says, though it seems impossible. They needed to believe God's power to give water in the desert. Elisha emphasized "this is what the Lord says." With faith in the Lord, they needed to dig ditches in the valley. This was a message of good news to the kings. But it was hard for them to imagine that water would fill the arid desert. Then Elisha said, "This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord." He went on to prophesy that the three kings would defeat Moab completely (19). God wants to do great things through us. But we must have faith in God. We must dig ditches before the water comes.

What happened? In the early morning of the next day, the land was filled with water. The three kings and their armies could drink and water their animals too. God's overflowing blessing revived them in body and spirit. At the same time, the Moabites thought that the water was blood. They assumed the three kings slaughtered each other. But when they went out to plunder them, the Israelites rose

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up and defeated them, destroying all the towns of Moab. It was a great victory, as Elisha had prophesied.

During a time of national crisis, Elisha saved the nation by listening to the Lord and giving the right advice to the kings. In this way he became a shepherd of the kings. Those who hear God's word can be shepherds for kings and prayer servants for nations. We must pray for our nation, and for our president--to listen to God's word and make right decisions, so we can live holy lives and obey the world mission command (1 Ti 2:1-4).

### II. Elisha, a shepherd of his people (4:1-44)

Elisha was now an important person. He could have enjoyed national honor and power. Instead, he lived with his people and worked miracles for them out of a shepherd's heart. Let's learn how he shepherded his people.

The first miracle: filling empty jars with a little oil (1-7). A man of God lived poorly and died with a great debt. Now his creditor was coming to enslave his sons. It was more than his widow could bear. She hated to think of her lovely young sons living in the misery of slavery. Some parents would kill their children and themselves in an effort to prevent this from happening. But this woman came to God's servant and cried out for help. How did Elisha respond? Look at verse 2a. "Elisha replied to her, 'How can I help you?'" These words reflect God's heart. God is the Helper of his people (Ex 18:4; Dt 33:29; Ps 10:14 Isa 41:1). Elisha shared God's heart toward those in need. So even after shepherding kings, he was still mindful of a nameless woman in need. The issue was how to help her. Elisha could have given her money. He could have cried together with her, saying: "I am so sorry. But I cannot do anything." Or he could have criticized the wicked creditor and called down fire from heaven on him. Instead, Elisha asked her, "Tell me, what do you have in your house?" Elisha helped her to find what she had.

How did she respond? Look at verse 2b. "'Your servant has nothing there at all,' she said, 'except a little oil.'" A little oil was all she had. Elisha found a possibility in the little oil. So he asked her to collect empty jars from all her neighbors. He said, "Don't ask for just a few." That means to ask for many. Elisha's direction sounded unreasonable. The woman could have been rebellious, thinking, "Do you want to humiliate me before my neighbors?" But she simply trusted God's servant and obeyed by faith. She borrowed jars from her neighbors and began to pour oil in them. **A miracle happened! The oil came out continually; it stopped flowing only when there were no more jars.** The proceeds were enough to settle her debt

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with some left over for her and her sons to live on. She experienced the power of faith, as did her sons. So often in helping others we focus on solving problems. It is best to plant faith in God through the problems. Those who experience the power of faith can be right with God, and live under God's blessings continually.

**The second miracle: a childless woman bears a son (8-17).** Elisha went to Shunem in Northern Israel. A well-to-do woman urged him to stay for a meal. Elisha was encouraged by her humble servanthip, and often stopped there to enjoy eating fellowship. She was not burdened by his visits. Rather, she wanted to serve him more. So she persuaded her husband to make and furnish a small room on the roof for him. It was a place for Elijah to have personal Bible study and prayer, and to be refreshed. Why did she do this? It was because she recognized Elisha as a holy man of God (9). Serving him was the expression of her love for God, and for her nation Israel.

Elisha was thankful for the Shunammite woman's kind service. So one day he called her and said, "You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?" But she answered, "I have a home among my own people." She was content with what she had. She served purely out of love for God, and respect for God's servant. This must have endeared her to Elisha all the more. So he really wanted to bless her. But how? By the help of Gehazi, Elisha realized that she had no son and her husband was old. So Elisha blessed her, saying, "About this time next year, you will hold a son in your arms." Only the Sovereign God can give life. Yet Elisha prophesied by faith out his great shepherd's heart. She said, "No, my lord. Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" Her words reveal that she really wanted a son, but had given up hope of having one (28). Elisha did not say, "Okay. Forget about it." Elisha blessed her according to her true heart's desire. God honored Elisha's faith and she became pregnant. The next year about that same time, she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had said (17). Here we learn that God is the author of life. God can give a son to a childless woman.

**The third miracle: raising a dead son (18-37).** The child grew. He was a source of joy to his parents, especially his mother. Then one day, an unexpected thing happened. The boy cried out, "My head! My head!" Then, after sitting in his mother's lap for awhile, he died. It was the most sorrowful and painful thing she had ever experienced. She could have despaired, thinking that death was the end. Or she could have complained to the Lord, doubting God's love. At this moment, what did she do?

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"She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out" (21). She believed her son would rise again and prepared for it. She believed that God who gave life could restore life to her son. She had resurrection faith. So she did not want to stir up people with talk of the boy's death. She secretly went to Elisha at Mount Carmel to ask his help. It was a journey of about fifteen miles. Along the way she met Gehazi. She told him, "Everything is all right." However, when she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet in humble and earnest supplication. Gehazi tried to push her away, not knowing her agony. But the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why." She said, "Did I ask you for a son, my lord? Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes?'" In that moment, she thought that if she had never had a son, she would have been better off. Still, she believed that God could help her through Elisha.

Elisha wanted to solve the problem through Gehazi. But the child's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." It meant she would stay with Elisha until he personally went to take care of her son. So he got up and followed her. When Elisha reached the house, he went into the room, shut the door and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Perhaps, simultaneously, Elisha experienced the coldness of death. So he got up and walked back and forth to warm up and to pray more fervently. It was a great spiritual struggle against the power of death that required Elisha to give his life. Elisha stretched out upon the boy once more. Then the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. He was alive! Elisha gave him back to his mother. She fell at Elisha's feet and bowed to the ground out of her deep thanks. Then she took her son and went out. Here we learn that God can raise the dead. God is the life and the resurrection. We also learn Elisha's faith. He believed that God could raise the dead and acted on his faith.

**The fourth miracle: removing the poison of death (38-41).** Elisha returned to Gilgal to have Bible study with the company of prophets. They were all hungry due to a famine in the land. Elisha asked his servant to cook a stew for lunch, but there were no ingredients. So one of them found gourds on a wild vine, and put these in the pot. Expecting a delicious meal, they began to eat it. But it was terrible; it was poison. They cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" They did not try to blame the culprit, saying, "Who put poisoned gourds in the pot?" They only cried out to the man of God. The young prophets had learned to love one another, and face challenges together in God. By faith, Elisha put flour in the pot, and it removed the poison of death. They experienced the power of God

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practically, and could also eat deliciously. Many young people in our land have eaten from the pot of modern culture and contracted the poison of death. They have lost their hopes and dreams, desire for greatness, and true beauty. But the word of God has power to heal us. We don't need to blame the young, or their parents. We need only to share God's word with them. God will heal them.

**The fifth miracle: feeding the hungry prophets (42-44).** A man came to Elisha from Baal Shalishah. He brought the firstfruits of his harvest to Elisha, not to the apostate priests at Bethel or Dan. Though it seemed to be a personal gift, Elisha did not keep it for himself. He told his servant to give it to the hungry young prophets. Yet it was not enough for all 100 of them; there were only 20 barley loaves. Elisha's servant asked, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" Indeed, if the hungry prophets fought over the food, it would destroy their beautiful fellowship. However, while the servant thought only about people, Elisha thought of God. He planted practical faith in God in the young prophets. Let's read verse 43b. "But Elisha answered, 'Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: "They will eat and have some left over.'"" As the word of the Lord foretold, they all ate and were satisfied and even had some left over. Here we learn that Elisha's giving spirit, love for his disciples and faith in God Almighty produced a miracle. This reminds us of Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish.

We have studied how God was with his people in a dark time through a good shepherd, Elisha. Elisha shepherded kings and the nation with courage and faith in a time of crisis. Elisha led them to God who intervened to give them victory. Elisha shepherded ordinary people, both the poor and the well-to-do, one by one, according to their need. And Elisha raised disciples, establishing a company of prophets who practiced faith in God and love for one another. We can see a contrast between Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was a fiery man of God who challenged people to repent, like John the Baptist. Elisha was a shepherd who served all kinds of people like our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus wants us to be shepherds like him. 1 Peter 5:2a says, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care." Our times are dark, like those of Israel. We hear terrible stories of immorality and violence every day. Our economy recovers slowly. We cannot expect government to solve our spiritual problems. But God is willing to intervene in our nation's history. God wants to touch the lives of people and reveal his love and power. God wants to use people like Elisha to do so. Let's pray to learn the shepherd life of Elisha: his great faith in God Almighty, his deep compassion for his people, and his challenging spirit in times of adversity. Let's pray to be shepherds like Elisha. God will surely use us to heal our land, and to raise up a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.