



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for February 1, 2009  
Released on Wednesday, January 28, 2009**

**“Commitment to God’s Messenger”**

**Scripture Lesson: 2 Kings 4:8–17.**

**Devotional Reading: Luke 6:32–36.**

**Background Scripture: 2 Kings 4:8–17.**

**Place: Shunem**

**Time: 852 and 848 B.C.**

**HOW TO SAY IT**

ABISHAG. *Ab-ih-shag.*

BAAL. *Bay-ul.*

ELIJAH. *Ee-lye-juh.*

ELISHA. *Ee-lye-shuh.*

GEHAZI. *Geh-hay-zye* (G as in *get*).

GILBOA. *Gil-bo-uh* (G as in *get*).

ISSACHAR. *Izz-uh-kar.*

JEZREEL. *Jez-ree-el* or *Jez-reel.*

SHUNAMMITE. *Shoo-nam-ite.*

SHUNEM. *Shoo-nem.*

**SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT:**

**2 Kings 4:8–17**

**8** 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.

**9** And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.

**10** 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.

**11** And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.

**12** And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

**13** 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.

**14** And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.

- 15** And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.
- 16** 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.
- 17** And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

### **LESSON AIMS**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- 1.** Describe the relationship between Elisha and the Shunammite woman.
- 2.** Tell how the Shunammite's example of service without expectation of reward is an example for Christians today.
- 3.** Identify one need that another person has and commit to meeting that need.

### **INTRODUCTION**

While miracles appear throughout the Bible, there were three specific times when clusters of miracles occurred: during the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan, during the days of Elijah and Elisha, and during the days of Jesus and the apostles. In the first time period, God was working with His people to establish a special relationship with them. In the second, Baal worship was prominent, and God was manifesting Himself over that false religion. In the third, Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled, and the church was begun.

God is a miracle-working God, and if we observe His ways today, we can still see evidences of that. Maybe modern-day miracles are not as dramatic as those we read in the Bible, but they are still the works of God and should cause us to rejoice.

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Today's story from 2 Kings is part of a larger series of stories about Elisha in chapter 4. Here we have the accounts of the widow's oil (vs. 1-7), the poisoned stew (vs. 38-41), and the multiplication of bread for a hundred men (vs. 42-44). These stories are themselves part of a larger complex of accounts about Elisha and the consequences of his prophetic ministry among the kings of Israel (2 Kings 2-13).

Elisha was a prophet of Israel in the time of the divided kingdom (the kingdom of Israel to the north and the kingdom of Judah to the south). Today's lesson concerns perhaps the time around 840 BC. Elisha's ministry started when his mentor, Elijah, was taken up into Heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). As mentioned, the combined ministries of Elijah and Elisha fought against the influences of Baalism, its priests, and the kings who worshiped Baal.

The place of today's story is well known. Shunem is located near the plain of Jezreel in the tribal territory of Issachar, about five miles north of the town of Jezreel itself (Joshua 19:18). It was at Shunem that the Philistines had gathered to do battle with the Israelites as led by Saul and his sons, who had gathered at Gilboa (1 Samuel 28:4); that had taken place something like 170 years in the past by the time of today's lesson. It is from this place that the beautiful Abishag came; she cared for King David at the end of his life (see 1 Kings 1:1-4).

Apparently the land around Shunem was productive and fertile. It allowed the Shunammite woman and her husband of today's lesson to experience a measure of wealth, for they had servants to work their fields (see 2 Kings 4:18-20).

### **QUESTIONS**

#### **CARING FOR GOD'S SERVANT—2 Kings 4:8—10**

- 1. What happened to the prophet Elisha as he passed through Shunem one day (2 Kings 4:8)?**

Elisha makes regular trips to the Jordan valley, perhaps visiting various prophetic groups located at Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal (see 2 Kings 2:1–18). On such visits, Elisha passes through *Shunem*.

One day as Elisha passed through Shunem, a prominent woman there invited him to stop for a meal. The Hebrew is interesting in that the woman is called a "great woman." All Hebrew scholars agree that this refers to a well-to-do woman, a woman of wealth. Perhaps she married into this wealth in an arranged marriage, for her husband is much older than she (see v. 14, below).

Elisha apparently was not one to automatically expect generous deeds from others. This is suggested by the fact that when the Shunammite woman invited him to eat at her home, she had to insist strongly ("constrained"), according to the original language. It speaks well of Elisha that he had this attitude, because it is far too common for some in the Lord's work today to assume certain privileges. Some ministers make a point, for example, of letting businesses know they are in the ministry and expect discounts. This attitude casts a negative reflection on the ministry and the cause of Christ.

After this first acceptance of the woman's invitation, Elisha evidently received a standing offer to stop in for lunch anytime he passed through the area. He felt comfortable doing so, and it became his regular practice.

For hospitality to be accepted, it must not only be genuinely offered, it must also be "pushed." From experience, I know that for hospitality to be received requires a subtle form of aggressiveness if polite refusals are to be overcome. Many people have difficulty accepting hospitality. But when it is genuinely offered and we feel *constrained*, well ... there is no way to refuse! Such is Elisha's case.

## **2. What are some specific ways we can and should practice hospitality?**

When we recognize that all we have are gifts from God, then we can follow Peter's instructions to "use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Peter 4:9). The second element necessary to be able to practice this grace is to have eyes that are aware of needs. This means staying alert to what is going on around us. Providing overnight accommodations to those who need it is but one way of "distributing to the necessity of saints" (Romans 12:13). The bigger picture is that of opening up our lives.

## **3. What idea did the woman think of, and what was the first thing she did about it (vs. 9,10)?**

After (apparently) several visits by Elisha, the woman shares with *her husband* her thoughts about the special traveler. This woman is an astute judge of character in that she correctly evaluates Elisha to be *a holy man of God*. Somehow she perceives an aura of the divine about him. The text does not tell us exactly how she comes to this conclusion, but she is able to discern Elisha's character and persona probably from his manner of speech and behavior over the course of several visits.

In consultation with her husband, the Shunammite woman suggests making a more comfortable place for Elisha to stay when he visits. *On the wall* means that the room is built up on the roof. Roofs have various practical uses in ancient times (compare 1 Samuel 9:25; Acts 10:9). So to build a room up there is not a surprising thing to do.

In that room, the prophet Elisha will be able to enjoy the comforts of a *bed*, some kind of a *table* at which he can read and write, and a *stool* or chair for sitting. *Candlestick* refers to the oil lamps of various sizes and shapes used in ancient times. Such a lamp is a shaped item of pottery, having a pinched neck for holding a wick to burn the olive or sesame oil that is stored in the base. Elisha's rooftop room will be

completely walled on all sides with a roof of its own. This would give him a place of privacy that he would not have anywhere else in the house.

Some Christians today speak of making an "Elisha room" for visiting missionaries and others who need hospitality. Such an arrangement encourages a mind-set of hospitality, for it is always available when needed.

#### **4. What are benefits we receive when we practice hospitality? Or is such a question even appropriate? Explain.**

Jesus tells us to give without expecting anything in return (Luke 6:35). But in almost the next breath He says to "give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom" (Luke 6:38).

We may begin to sort out this tension by acknowledging that many of the benefits we receive when we minister to others are of an intangible nature. It may be a hug or handshake, a smile, a tear of joy, or a heartfelt thank you. The joy of knowing that we have pleased God is the major benefit. Many who go into a situation to offer assistance for those who are in need often end up saying they were ministered to and blessed in a stronger way than what they felt they provided for others.

#### **APPRECIATION EXPRESSED BY GOD'S SERVANT—2 Kings 4:11–17**

#### **5. Who was Gehazi, and what did Elisha have him do one day as the prophet was lying on his bed relaxing (vs. 11 –13)?**

For the first time, Elisha's servant, Gehazi, enters this particular storyline. He is a "go between" for the prophet and the hospitable woman. Perhaps Elisha thinks his direct conversation with the woman will skew her response, and thus she will not answer as freely as she might otherwise. Elisha is very much appreciative of what she has done and wants to return the kindness, so he asks, *What is to be done for thee?* He even suggests some kind of intervention with *the king or captain* of the army on her behalf.

Some suggest that Elisha's performance in the war against Moab had given him ready access to the king and the military (2 Kings 3). Knowing her husband was old, Elisha offered his influence to provide her and her property with royal protection.

Her reply "I dwell among mine own people" (2 Kings 4:13) signifies something like "we can take care of ourselves." She sees no need for a reward. She has not gone out of her way to offer hospitality to Elisha because of anticipation of reward.

#### **6. What led Elisha to ask the woman a second time (vs. 14, 15)?**

Elisha's attempt to discover something special he could do to reward this woman did not work, and he was left wondering. Evidently after the woman gave Elisha her response, she quietly turned and left his presence, because now he asked Gehazi, "What then is to be done for her?"

But Elisha will not take *no* for an answer! He wishes to reward this extraordinary woman somehow, and so he brainstorms with Gehazi, his servant. Aha! ...Gehazi answered, the woman has "no child, and her husband is old." Without further explanation, he left the conclusion up to Elisha.

Once again Elisha told Gehazi to call the woman to him, and once again she stood in his presence. Not knowing quite what to expect and feeling that she had already given her response regarding no needs, she did not come any further into the room than the doorway. It was not a matter of disrespect; it was simply a matter of feeling that the subject was already closed and he was not going to change her mind on it.

**7. What are some specific ways that we can help others who feel they do not want or need our help? How do we avoid the danger of having a “rescuer mentality” as we make our list?**

Sometimes people may feel they do not need help when they really do. Pride may cause them to fail to acknowledge this. Practicing acts of secret service by anonymously dropping off a bag of groceries or sending a gift card for a restaurant, gas station, or grocery store may help without causing embarrassment. Yet there may be times when we want to do something for others who really do not need assistance. Knowing the difference in the situations requires discernment.

**8. What unexpected announcement did Elisha make to the woman, and what was her immediate response (v. 16)?**

Suddenly she heard words that surely shocked her to the core of her being: “About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son.”

Elisha earlier had offered to “pull strings” with earthly authorities to reward the woman. Now Elisha goes beyond that, since the statement *thou shalt embrace a son* must include making an appeal to God himself. To this we may compare similar prophetic promises in Genesis 18:10; Judges 13:3; and Luke 1:13.

The woman of Shunem, however, was not prepared for this announcement and immediately responded by telling Elisha not to lie to her. She cannot believe it. To be rewarded with a child is beyond comprehension or even imagination, given her situation.

It was not that she did not want a son. Just as every Hebrew woman desired to present her husband with a son, so did this woman. But it had not happened, and the age of her husband made it appear it would not. It would indeed be cruel of Elisha to tell her this if it were not going to become a reality.

**9. What was the outcome of Elisha’s words, and why did God do this (v. 17)?**

What a joyful verse: “And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life” (2 Kings 4:17)! Can you imagine the joy in her heart when she first realized she was pregnant? Can you imagine the hope and longing that attended those first weeks following Elisha’s statement? For three months nothing changed, and then one day something was different! She who had been committed to ministering to the holy man of God was rewarded by the joy of bearing a baby boy.

For a *woman* with no offspring and an elderly husband, Elisha’s promise becomes the greatest reward possible! No one should offer hospitality with the thought, “OK, now what am I going to get out of this?” We don’t get the slightest hint that the woman ever thinks, “If I build Elisha a room, my husband and I will end up with a child.” Godly people offer hospitality to please God. Yet God may surprise us with unexpected blessings.

**CONCLUSION**

The Shunammite of today’s lesson was wealthy, but not miserly. She used her wealth to accommodate a prophet in his difficult journeys by giving him a special room. This provided Elisha respite from the heat, a bed for the evening, food and drink, and a light by which to read and/or write.

This woman knew when to speak and when to keep silent before a “holy man of God.” She asked for no favors, even from a powerful prophet. When offered certain rewards, she declined without suggesting any alternative ideas. She stressed that she relied solely on her own resources to sustain herself.

This woman was also a practical realist. When given the promise of a son, she offered a response of disbelief. She knew all too well, both from observation and personal experience, what the laws of nature meant in terms of her childless status. But the God who created the laws of nature can surprise us.

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

1. God will take care of those who faithfully serve Him (2 Kings 4:8).
2. God's way of meeting the needs of His servants is usually through His people (vs. 9-10).
3. Hospitality is an important ministry and one that brings rich blessings (vs. 11-13).
4. If we are sensitive to others and willing to serve, we will see people's needs (v. 14).
5. God never makes empty promises, for He cannot lie (vs. 15-16).
6. God is not limited by the things that constrain us; with Him, nothing is impossible (v. 17).

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

The practice of hospitality never goes out of style.

### **PRAYER**

Father, teach us to practice hospitality to one another without complaining. May we offer hospitality even to (or especially to) strangers in need. May we offer our best and our most with no thought of personal gain, so that others may be encouraged along the way of life. Remind us continually that the hospitality we offer is as unto Jesus himself. May this be all to Your honor and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Read 2 Samuel 11 to recall David's great sin of lusting for Bathsheba, committing adultery with her, and arranging for her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle so that he might marry her. It is an account of how anyone can yield to temptation.

February 8<sup>th</sup>'s lesson is titled, "Commitment to Confront." The lesson text is 2 Samuel 12:1—7a, 13—15. You should study 2 Samuel 11:1—12:15 in preparation for this lesson. *Good studying!*

### **LESSON SUMMARIZED BY**

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