

## Elisha ~ Part 5

In my last post, we continued to explore the ministry of **Elisha** by looking at **3 Kings 3:11-20** where we learn of another **Divine Intervention**. In this post, we learn that **Grace Pays the Debt** in **2 Kings 4:1-7**.

*"<sup>1</sup> The wife of one of the guild prophets complained to Elisha. "Your servant, my husband, died," she said, "and you know that he feared Adonai. Now a creditor has come to take my two children as his slaves."<sup>2</sup> Elisha asked her, "What should I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She answered, "Your servant has nothing in the house but a flask of oil."<sup>3</sup> Then he said, "Go, and borrow containers from all your neighbors, empty containers; and don't borrow just a few!"<sup>4</sup> Then go in; shut the door, with you and your sons inside; and pour oil into all those containers; and as they are filled, put them aside."<sup>5</sup> So she left him and shut the door on herself and her sons. They brought her the containers while she poured. <sup>6</sup> When the containers were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another container"; but he answered, "There isn't another container." Then the oil stopped flowing. <sup>7</sup> She came and told the man of God; and he said, "Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt; then you and your sons can live on what's left." ~ 2 Kings 4:1-7 (CJB)*

From the great international conflict, **Elisha** returned to the concerns of the *guild prophets*. He followed the example of his mentor, **Eliyahu**, who had ministered to families (1 Kings 17:8-24). The fact that the woman was a widow and the mother of two sons shows that the *guild prophets* were not a celibate monastic group. It appears that **Elisha** knew this man and that he had a reputation for godliness.

This nameless widow of the prophets is rescued from anonymity early on in Jewish tradition. Josephus makes her the wife of **Obadiah**, the servant of **Ach'av** (1 Kings 18:3-4), who risked his life to save a hundred prophets otherwise to be slain by **Izevel** (*Ant.* 9.47-48). The cause of the debt is that **Obadiah** borrowed money for the maintenance of the prophets while in hiding. After he died his widow and her children are in danger of being carried off into slavery. The widow's plea is that **Elisha** will have mercy on her because of the noble deed of her husband in preserving the prophets. The **Targums**<sup>1</sup> also identify the widow as the wife of Obadiah.

According to Hebrew law, a creditor could take the debtor and the children as servants but was not to treat them like slaves (Exodus 21:1-11; Leviticus 25:29-31; Deuteronomy 15:1-11). It would be heartbreaking for this woman to lose her husband to death and her two sons to servitude, but God is the defender, sustainer and provides justice for the widow (Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalms. 68:5; 146:9) and He sent **Elisha** to help her.

God often begins with what we already have. **Moshe** had a rod in his hand, and God used that to accomplish great things (Exodus 4:2). **Kefa** and his partners had fishing nets in their hands (Luke 5), and the lad had a few loaves and fishes (John 6). All that the poor widow had was a little oil in a vessel. **Elisha** instructed her to shut the door so that nobody would see that a miracle was occurring in her house, and no doubt she warned her sons to keep quiet. The number of vessels she had limited the amount of oil she received, and that was controlled by her faith. When she sold the oil, she had enough money to pay off the debt and maintain herself and her two sons.

The story of God's provision is told without embellishment. **Elisha** asks two questions about the widow's need and resources, to which she responds. He then tells her what to do, and she dutifully obeys. The oil is a divine gift that is not dependent on the presence of the man of God and cannot be viewed as some trick. No details are given following **Elisha's** final instruction (v. 7), but it may be assumed that the woman obeys without question. Her debts are paid, and her family remains together.

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<sup>1</sup> An ancient Aramaic paraphrase or interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, of a type made from about the 1st century CE when Hebrew was declining as a spoken language. ~ Oxford Dictionary.

The Lord does not always perform miracles of this kind to help us pay our debts, but He does meet our needs if we trust and obey. If we give everything to Him, He can make a little go a long way. This miracle also reminds us of the greatest miracle of all, the gracious forgiveness of our debts to the Lord through faith in **Yeshua**. It did not cost **Elisha** anything for God to provide the needed money to pay the debt, but it cost **Yeshua** His life to be able to forgive us our sins.

In my next post, we continue to explore the life of **Elisha**. In this post, we learn about another **Great Woman** in **2 Kings 4:8-10**.