

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

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**Speaker:** Mr. David Anderson

## Lessons from the life of Elisha: Elisha – the blessing

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to audit the company at which I spent the majority of my career. I'd been part of the initial team that developed the company as an independent entity. I was interested in how the next generation were taking the business forward in these difficult economic times. As we heard in last week's talk, Elisha served God after Elijah, that is, at the end of the evil reigns of Ahab and Ahaziah over the northern kingdom of Israel. Those were difficult times indeed for a new prophet and Elijah was a difficult act to follow. Also, Jehoram, the next king continued the downward course of the monarchy. 2 Kings 3:2-3 comments: "[Jehoram] did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, though not like his father and mother, for he put away the pillar of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless, he clung to the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin; he did not depart from it" (English Standard Version). How did Elisha get on? Well, in summary, his long career as a prophet of Jehovah was one of great blessing to those he served. Perhaps this was because he'd asked Elijah for a double portion of his spirit, 2:9. Elijah had confronted Ahab and Israel about the judgement from God. He did so with great power and authority. But Elisha used that same power to bring God's grace to His erring people. In Luke 1:17, the angel said that John the Baptist would go before the Lord Jesus in the spirit and power of Elijah in order to make the people of Israel ready to receive Him. And we know from John 1:16 that the Lord Jesus came in fullness of grace. So as we look at Elisha the blessing, we'll also see something of the true Blessing himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact the Lord inferred this in Matthew 11:14-20, when He spoke to the crowds about their reactions to John's ministry and His own ministry.

### 1. Elisha blesses Jericho, 2 Kings 2:19-22

The inhabitants of Jericho told Elisha that Jericho was a nice place to live but there were problems with the water supply and the barrenness of the surrounding agricultural land. He responded by adding salt to the spring from which the city obtained its water. Now, as a chemist, I know that it requires more than a bowl full of salt to purify raw water! But the water source miraculously became good drinking water according to the word that Elisha spoke: "Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it", verse 21. How gracious of God to act in this way to the city cursed by Joshua! (Joshua 6:26). Jericho had been rebuilt by a man whose defiant actions are a comment on the sorry state of Israel at that time: "Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun", 1 Kings 16:33-34. Elisha is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus who came to dispense blessing to a world cursed by sin. Just as salt was added to Jericho's water, so the Lord provided the answer to sin in a righteous way. "For, as sin reigned in death, grace reigns through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord", Romans 5:21.

### 2. Elisha blesses the armies of, and with, Israel, 2 Kings 3

Jehoram enlisted the help of the army of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, to defeat the rebellion of the king of Moab. They were joined by the army of the king of Edom. After seven days of circuitous marching, they found themselves in a place without any water to drink. Fearing defeat, they sought Elisha's advice. Elisha was somewhat reluctant to help an unfaithful king but was persuaded by the presence of Jehoshaphat. Elisha responded: "Thus says the LORD, 'I will make this dry streambed full of pools.' For thus says the LORD, 'You shall not see wind or rain, but that streambed shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your livestock, and your animals.' This is a light thing in the sight of the LORD. He will also give the Moabites into your hand", verses 16-17. When the Moabites approached for battle, the reflection of the sun on these pools of water looked like blood. So they casually came for the spoil and were completely routed by Israel. From this incident, we learn how undeserving we are of the bountiful grace of God. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us," Romans 5:6-8.

### 3. Elisha blesses a prophet's widow, 2 Kings 4:1-7

A widow of one of the prophets came to Elisha in distress. A creditor had come to claim her to children to be his slaves. The only thing she possessed was a jar of oil. Elisha told her to borrow lots of containers from her neighbours,

to go into the house, close the doors, and pour oil from the jar into the vessels. Then she was to sell the oil in order both to pay off her debts and to have sufficient to provide for herself and her sons. This miracle pictures the God who is willing to cancel the debt when we have nothing to pay as price for our sins, see Luke 7:36-50.

#### **4. Elisha blesses the Shunammite woman, 2 Kings 4:8-37**

This wealthy woman of Shunem provided hospitality for Elisha whenever he was in her district. So much so, that she set aside a small room, consisting of a bed, a chair and a lamp, for his exclusive use. Elisha decided to do something in return for her kindness but, when asked, she said that was content with life as God has allotted her. After she had left the interview, Gehazi, his servant, sensitively pointed out that she was childless and her husband was old. This prompted Elisha to promise her a child and she bore a son in the spring of the following year. Children are always a precious gift from the Lord for they make up a family. Married couples who find themselves in need of a family can look to the Lord Jesus, knowing that although He said, "all things are possible with God", His will is paramount.

Years later, this son collapsed from sunstroke whilst out harvesting with his father. He was taken to his mother but died soon afterwards. She immediately placed the boy's corpse on Elisha's bed. She saddled a donkey and, to the bemusement of her husband, set out for the man of God at Mount Carmel. Elisha saw her coming and, realising something was wrong, sent Gehazi to her. "All is well" she replied, not stopping in her haste to get to Elisha. She grabbed hold of his feet in her distress and said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'" verse 28. Sending Gehazi before him to lay his staff on the child's face, Elisha set out for Shunem and found the child dead upon the bed. Shutting Gehazi and the woman out, he prayed for the boy. Twice he laid himself out on the child. The first time until he detected warmth, then a second time when the boy sneezed seven times. He summoned Gehazi to bring in the mother. "And when she came to him, he said, "Pick up your son." She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground. Then she picked up her son and went out", verses 36-37. Once again, we are reminded of the Lord Jesus and the compassion He had for those who had been bereaved of their only child. Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son were both brought back to life and their families were greatly comforted. And today Jesus brings His own special comfort into such circumstances of life with the words: "I am the resurrection and the life", John 11:25.

#### **5. Elisha blesses the sons of the prophets at Gilgal, 2 Kings 4:38-41**

There was a famine raging throughout the land of Israel and the prophetic band looked to Elisha for help. Gehazi was instructed to boil stew in a large pot. One of the company gathered some herbs from a wild vine and added these to the pot. Unwittingly, he also gathered some wild gourds, which were only detected when the men came to eat the stew. "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" was their cry. Elisha simply added flour to the pot, which miraculously removed the poison and made the stew edible. How wonderful to know that the Lord Jesus Christ has overcome death and that through death he has destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. Therefore He's able deliver all who fear death - see Hebrews 2:14-15. He says to us again today: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades", Revelation 1:17-18.

#### **6. Elisha blesses the hungry, 2 Kings 4:42-44**

When during the famine, a man from Baal-shalishah presented Elisha with twenty barley loaves and fresh ears of grain as the bread of the firstfruits, he was told to give them to the hungry people. But Gehazi reckoned that there wasn't enough to feed everyone. So Elisha repeated the instruction and said: "for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left'". They all ate and there were leftovers, in accordance with this word of the LORD. This reminds us of the feeding of the 5,000 by the Lord Jesus using 5 barley loaves and 2 fishes. There were 12 baskets from the fragments of food that remained after the multitude had their hunger satisfied, John 6:1-15. As we saw with the widow's jar of oil, our own inadequacies and our limited resources will be very effective in the service of God when placed into the hands of the Master. But notice the Lord's advice in John 6:27: "Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal". The Lord Jesus himself is the Bread of Life and His words are the essence of eternal life.

#### **7. Elisha blesses Naaman the leper, 2 Kings 5**

The gospel is often preached from this story about the cleansing of Naaman's leprosy. The poignant words "but he was a leper" in verse 1 are used to highlight the fact that everyone has sinned. (The disease in those days called 'leprosy' and its contaminating effects provide a scriptural picture of sin and its effects.) Naaman was blessed by Elisha only when he obeyed the word to wash seven times in the river Jordan. Neither letter from the king of Syria nor any gift to the man of God availed. In fact all of the ways and ideas of Naaman demonstrate the complete failure of human efforts to achieve salvation from sin. Faith in God's way was the only thing that was required of Naaman. It is commanded of everyone today. How simple is verse 14: "So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was

clean"! Similarly, although all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, anyone can be justified by receiving salvation as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God provides propitiation by Jesus' blood. This fact must be personally received by faith. It is the only way God's righteousness is obtained by guilty sinners – see Romans 3:23-25. And what is the unique quality of the blood of Christ? "The blood of Jesus Christ [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin", 1 John 1:7 (King James Version).

Luke 4:27 states that the Lord Jesus said in the synagogue at Nazareth: "there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian". He gave the warning that whilst the Gospel is unto all, it's only upon all them that believe - see Romans 3:22 (King James Version).

#### **8. Elisha blesses one of the prophetic band, 2 Kings 6:1-7**

Once Elisha was accompanying the sons of the prophets on a building project and as they were felling logs, an axe head came off and sank into the river Jordan. The person using the axe cried out: "Alas, my master! It was borrowed". Elisha cut off a stick and threw into the water where the axe head had fallen. Now you don't have to be a scientist to appreciate that it was a miracle when the iron floated! The feller reached out his hand and took it out of the water. What do we learn about the Lord Jesus from this incident? First of all, we know that He demonstrated His power over nature when He walked on the water to cross the Sea of Galilee. Secondly, the Jordan is a picture of death. The Lord Jesus went into death when He died for our sins and triumphed over it by rising again!

#### **9. Elisha blesses the Syrian army, 2 Kings 6:8-23.**

The king of Syria's war plans were continually being thwarted by Elisha, who advised the king of Israel of each Syrian strategy. When the Syrian monarch finally realised it was Elisha who was the informant, he decided to capture him. He surrounded Elisha at Dothan. When Elisha's servant saw the siege, he was afraid and panicked. "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" he asked. Elisha told him not to worry because there were more for them than in the Syrian army. Elisha prayed: "LORD, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see". And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, verse 17 (King James Version). Next Elisha prayed that the army would be struck with blindness. Then he led them from Dothan to Samaria, into the hands of the king of Israel. There, Elisha blessed them. He showed them great mercy in that he didn't allow the king of Israel to smite them down. Instead they were sat down to a banquet before being returned safely to Syria. The grace shown to the Syrians shamed them from further raids upon Israel. This incident pictures the grace of God in action in the Gospel, which goes beyond the borders of Israel to the whole world. As Jesus said: "you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth", Acts 1:8 (King James Version).

#### **10. Elisha brings much needed blessing to a besieged Samaria, 2 Kings 6:24-7:19.**

Ben-hadad, king of Syria, changed tactics and besieged Samaria. A crisis was reached in the city when people started eating each other. The king of Israel blamed Elisha for letting Syria off the hook and demanded action from the prophet. But Elisha calmly replied that not only would the siege be over the next day, but that normal life would be resumed. During the night, the Lord made the Syrian army hear the sound of chariots and horses, the sound of a great army. They fled for their lives! Four Samaritan lepers found the abandoned camp and returned to the city with the good news of free victuals. The citizens of Samaria went out and plundered the camp of the Syrians. And so normal trading was recommenced in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Elisha. Like the four lepers, we have good news – that whoever wants can take of the water of life freely, see Revelation 22:17.

#### **11. Elisha blesses the Shunammite woman for the third time, 2 Kings 8:1-7**

When a seven-year famine arose in Israel, Elisha advised this woman, now widowed, to leave her home and country. So she took her entire household to the land of the Philistines for the duration of the famine. Upon her return, she went to appeal to the king of Israel for the restoration of her land and her house. Amazingly, at the very moment of her entry into the king's presence, no other than Gehazi was there. At the king's request, he was recounting all the great deeds of Elisha. He had reached the story of the reviving of the Shunammite's son to life when she walked in! The king immediately granted her request and appointed an official to ensure that it was done. How blessed to know: "that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose", Romans 8:28 (English Standard Version).

#### **12. Elisha's final blessings, 2 Kings 13:14-25**

For the whole 45 years of the reign of Jehu we hear nothing about Elisha. But the next king, Joash, finds blessings from Elisha's deathbed. Joash is told to shoot arrows eastward out of the windows whilst Elisha's hand was on top of the king's hand on the bow. Then the king was told to strike the ground with the arrows. Symbolically, these actions

represented the blessings of three victories over the king's enemies (Joash struck the ground with the arrows three times). This incident is a reminder of God's longsuffering grace. "The Lord is...patient...not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance", 2 Peter 3:9 (English Standard Version).

We finish with a most remarkable blessing – the giving of new life. After Elisha died and was buried, his bones contacted another dead man who was being hurriedly buried in his grave because some Moabite raiders were advancing upon the burial party. On touching Elisha's bones, the dead man immediately revived and stood on his feet! This is a picture of the resurrection. Let me finish with the blessings of eternal life secured by the resurrection of Christ. "Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power", Revelation 20:6 (English Standard Version).

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