

11036

ELISHA: THE MAN OF GOD

Speaker: BRO. JOHN MARTIN

Study #6 The Great Woman of Shunem

Reading: 2 Kings 4:8-37

My dear brethren and sisters and young people.

There seems to be in the record of the life of Elisha, a deliberate attempt on the part of the inspired record, to present for our consideration a series of contrasts within the story of Elisha itself and with the story of Elijah. There are some remarkable parallels in the lives of both of these prophets that are distinctly different in many respects. That you would have appreciated in the multiplication of the widow's oil; Elijah had a Gentile woman whose oil he had to multiply to provide food for herself. Elisha had an Israelitish woman, who wanted oil to sell, and whose oil was multiplied for others. And when we look at these records we sometimes feel they're similar, but you can see the great difference that exist there. And even in the story of Elisha itself, we have as it were deliberate contrast set before us. So on one occasion when Elisha is sitting with the sons of the prophets, and they are going to engage in a communal meal, one of the sons of the prophets unbeknown to his fellows, goes and gets a wild vine, which contains poisonous properties, and would have destroyed that communal feast, had it not been that it was detected. And yet the very next story that's told, is a man coming from Baal-shalisha, and he brings to Elisha precisely what the law required for the Passover feast and for the first fruits and for the priests, the exact things the Law required! And it would seem that a stark contrast is set before us, that an Israelite went and got a wild vine that which was not acceptable and it would seem that a man representing, at least the Gentiles, had brought exactly what the Law required, and had acknowledged Elisha as the great priest of the nation. They would seem to me, b&s, to be deliberate attempts on the part of the inspired record to excite our minds to see these contrasts and to appreciate the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, as they foreshadowed His work.

And we have another contrast before us this afternoon! There was a woman who was a widow; she had no husband and she felt that she was desolate in this life, and approached Elisha on this matter. She found much to her delight, that not only did she have something in her house of real value for herself, but she was able to provide for others. For she had in her house two sons who would have been a very great comfort to her, and she had a pot of oil, with which she was able to bring happiness and delight to many people and freedom to herself, so that a poor widow, b&s, was rich.

And there was a great woman of Shunem, who had a husband, and as the word 'great' implies, she was rich, she was wealthy, she was prosperous; she lived in the most fertile part of Israel, she lived on the plain of Jezreel, she had servants, they had asses, they had a large home, and she was poverty-stricken! because she lacked the one thing that made a woman a woman in Israel. She didn't have any children. And if ever there was a contrast put before us, we've got it put before us with these two women. She lacked one thing, and we today don't appreciate what she lacked; because, b&s, a boy, a man child in an Israelitish home, was everything to parents. Not simply because they wanted children, we want children too! but a man child in an Israelitish home, was the great desire of every married couple, within the confines of the borders of the Land of Israel, and the lack of a man child in any home, was a single mark of sorrow and reproach and mourning, because everyone wanted to contribute to the great line, to the great cause to which they'd been called. And any that could not contribute was considered, in deed, outcasts and suffered humiliation and reproach such as Hannah did! Such as Elizabeth did, such as Sarah did, and yet the prophet was able to call out, 'Sing and rejoice, O thou barren that didst not bear; far more shall be the children of the desolate than of the married', and ultimately God would cause these to come forth, and there were many children of the Old Testament that were born of the Spirit. Not in the sense that Jesus was, but had it not been for the intervention of God, they would never have been born.

Furthermore, b&s, consider this fact and fact I think it is, that not only did the Shulamites live in very prosperous surroundings, very, very prosperous surroundings, but it is evident from the record that she was young and the fact that she did not have a child was not anything to do with her, but the record says, 'her husband was old', clearly implying that she was not! And what was lacking in that house was genitive power on the part of the father. And that is eloquent; that the genitive power was lacking on part of the Father. And there had to be in that house, one that was going to be born from above, whose Father would spiritually be not of the flesh. And I believe as you read this story, you can't help but be impressed by this fact, that there is a calculated attempt in this story, to hide that woman's husband. He hardly plays any part in this story at all, and the record absolutely hides him and buries him as if he hardly existed, and we will see that as we go through the story. And if ever we had a story before, b&s and young people, that sets before us the birth, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, this is it!

And there was a great woman in Shunem! Now consider also the contrast that existed between her and the other woman. The other woman was a widow as was Israel, but she had two sons, as there were two divisions of the house of Israel, and because they lacked the things that were necessary, there were sold into slavery (I know the children weren't sold into slavery, but if it hadn't been for the intervention of Elijah they would have been, so she represented Israel, the two divisions who were going to be sold into slavery. But have a look at this story! Here's a woman who's free, she's a great woman of Shunem. And I once said before that word 'great' is used of people who were healthy and prosperous; it has that idea. So she was a free woman, she was not under bondage, she wasn't under slavery to any, and like Sarah 'the princess' the true wife of

Abraham, she was a free woman in contrast to Hagar, but Hagar's the one that had the child, and Sarah's the one that didn't. And had it not been, b&s, for the intervention of God this free woman would never have had a child; and she was a Shunammite which means 'peace and quiet'. The word 'Shunem' means 'peaceful and quiet', so that her name means 'peace and quiet' and she lived on the plain of 'Jezreel' which means 'God will sow' and bring forth a harvest (and you wait and see how that plays a part in this record). It will bring forth a harvest, God will sow, and she lived right on the edge of that plain.

And so here's a woman, she's free, she's not under bondage, but she can't have a child unless God intervenes (which He did) and therefore the child was born in this sense) by the power of the Spirit. Oh, he was born naturally, normal procreation between man and woman, no doubt about that, but had it not been for the intervention of God (that man was too old) and therefore, the power that conceived him was from on high. And he was brought forth, he came into that household, b&s, amidst great joy and rejoicing, as did the Lord Jesus Christ into the house of David through His mother Mary, and His Father, God! And there was rejoicing in Israel at his birth, but the boy died and so did the Lord Jesus Christ die! The boy was raised from the dead and so was the Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead, and in the 8th chapter of the 2nd book of Kings, we learn that there was a famine came into the Land for seven years. Seven years in which that woman was driven into the hands of the Philistines, at the end of the seven years, she was brought back, and she was given back her inheritance. Now, how do you like that for a parable? A barren woman representing the free woman of the Abrahamic covenant, having a child born by the power of the Spirit of God, who lives and dies and who was raised from the dead, after which the woman herself has to spend a typical period of seven years away from the Land of promise, at the end of which she is brought back into her inheritance again. A remarkable story, my dear b&s and young people; full of types and shadows, but I don't want to concentrate on that, I like these stories as they are! and as great as the shadow is, you know, it does us very, very good at times, b&s, to get down to the human relationships of these stories and to learn something from people, and to see whether we can glean from the characters that are sketched upon the pages of the Word of God, see if we can glean something that will do us good, and stand us in good stead as we go through the wilderness of life. And there are some very great people here, the great woman of Shunem and she was a great woman!

You know, she lived at Shunem; now Shunem is on the northeastern end of the plain of Jezreel. I'll just tell you where Shunem is and to tell you some of the associations of this place; you'll notice this has been a feature of these talks because, actually the history of these places plays a great part in the drama of the things which were enacted there. Now Shunem is right at the foot of the hill of Moreh on the plain of Jezreel at the northeastern end of it. Now the hill of Moreh, b&s, was known by the Israelites as Little Hermon, and it stands out of the plain about 5 miles distance from Mount Tabor, and I might mention, a short 3 miles further south, straight opposite it in full view of Shunem, was a city which contained another great woman, Jezebel! and there's something in this, believe me. And there were two great women and they lived almost as neighbours;

and this woman of Shunem lived at the foot of the hill of Moreh. The hill of Moreh, b&s, was renowned for the scene of Gideon's victory, and it was at that hill that Gideon went with his 300 men, and it was down to the foot of it that they went and crept out on that plain to drink water. And so the scene was quite an important one where great victories of faith were wrought there. It was a hill, b&s, which was readily accessible to a young boy who lived just north of that hill and who would have roamed that area quite frequently. A lad that when He was about 12 years of age, had done a lot of bible study, and He would have got down on that plain because He lived just north of it at Nazareth, only about 6 miles away. And what do you reckon He would have thought when He looked down on Shunem? and He thought about the resurrection of the woman's son who was born by the power of God; and what do you think He thought when many years later when He'd grown to manhood, He came to a city called 'Nain', which is the New Testament site of the city of Shunem? and He raised a boy from the dead for a widow woman? right out side the gate of that city! It will be wonderful associations in His mind of that place, and by the way, the word 'Nain' means 'a home'; it has that warm connotation, a home the word Nain means, and when you look at the word Shunem and the word Nain and you put them together, you have a home of peace and quiet. And no wonder when Elisha offered to speak for the king and to the captain of the host for the woman of Shunem, she answered, 'I'm very contented'; because she had a home that was peaceful, it was quiet and it was a home!

And you know, every day as the sun rose behind them in the east, they would have gone out into the fields in the plain of Jezreel, and if you've never been you can never appreciate this because, it is absolutely grand, really I suppose, when you compare the land with countries like Ronnie Abel's Canada and like Switzerland, it isn't really beautiful, but to me, there's nothing to be compared with it. There just isn't anything that can compare to it, and we stood over here on the hill of Megiddo, and took in the city in one sweep, b&s, and the whole of this country just sat there in the history of the nation. And as the woman of Shunem would come out in the morning, and her husband went out to the fields, straight up from them, stretching up in a westerly direction, northwesterly direction, for 15 miles was the plain of Jezreel. As flat as anything and there was the waving cornfields, a magnificent stretch of territory and up the top of it, like a great finger pointing up in the Mediterranean, Carmel. And Jeremiah had stood about there and had seen the whole scene, and he looked down towards Tabor which rises 2,000 feet straight up out of the plain in almost a perfect cone and stands away from the hills of Galilee, and he'd seen the figure of Carmel, like a great finger pointing up the Mediterranean and looking at this cone which would have rested at Tabor and running his eye down the great broad stretch of 15 miles of plain, to Carmel streaking out to the sea, he said concerning the invasion of Egypt, 'surely as Tabor is by the mountains and Carmel by the sea, so shall He come'. It was in a region like that the very topography of the land, which spoke so elegantly of the purpose of God, in many ways where that woman lived.

Hosea spoke about Jezreel and he spoke about how that God would ultimately sow Israel in the earth, that they'd bring forth a harvest and that harvest, b&s, 'would bring forth glory and honour to God and great would be the day of Jezreel' said Hosea. And it

was on that plain that the great Elijah ran the 12 or 15 miles down to Jezreel, streaking ahead of the chariot of Ahab and the rain thundering behind him on a parched and dry earth that had been so parched for 3 ½ years (the ministry of our Lord), all of these things that plain was saturated with, and the woman lived right up there, a great woman of Shunem and great she was!

And you know, whenever I think about that woman of Shunem, I can't help but be impressed that as you look at mount Tabor which would have been 5 miles north of where she lived, and you see that perfect cone standing out on the plain, I can't help but feel it was a symbol of that woman, because she stood out on that plain like Tabor; a gigantic figure of faith, a woman whose faith was so dominant that the rest of her household is overshadowed by the dominant faith of this wonderful person, and a wonderful person she was! And our sisters are going to get a kick out of this, because here is something for them to emulate. Here's a woman, b&s, that we can take to heart, a wonderful person.

Now look what happened! 'It fell on a day, we read in verse 8, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman'. As I mentioned before, the word 'great' is used both in the sense of 'a woman of position' and 'a woman of wealth'. As a matter of fact, Rotherham calls her 'a woman of position' and the RSV renders that 'a woman of wealth', so she was quite a notable personality on that plain. And 'she constrained Elisha to eat bread', and that word 'constrained' means 'she fastened on him', which women are apt to do, but the idea of that word is 'she fastened on him' but the whole idea, of course, is she urged him to eat bread. She urged him to eat bread. But notice what it said, 'and so it was that as oft as he passed by, he turned in hither to eat bread. What is Elisha doing going up and down passed Shunem? You see, she says that this man passes by us continually, at the end of verse 9; well, that's strange, because of all the things that Elisha did apart from this district and one other I believe, you'll find him working down in Samaria, later at Bethel at Gilgal, at Jordan or Jericho, but she sees him going passed Shunem continuously. (There he goes again?) Oh, there goes Elisha! You know, little things like this impress us because from this I learn he was a busy man. He was always passing Shunem and I also learned from that, b&s, that while his took him to the southern portion of Israel, that he was always passing by the north, and I feel that what the record is telling us is, that Elisha preferred this area rather than that one, and when the woman's son had died she went straight to where she knew she would find him, on Mount Carmel. And of course, anybody who wants to go to this area, could do so in many ways I suppose; they could cross through the pass of Megiddo here and come down through the Sharon, down the Shephelah and up into the hills of Judaea. Or they could come over further, and go over the hills of Samaria and right down through the highlands, or if they were in a hurry, a longer journey but an easier one would be to go straight down the plain and down through the valley of Jordan; and that's where Elisha must have been moving and he was always going passed the house of the woman of Shunem. A very busy man whose work was in the south, but whose heart was on Carmel! and I wonder why? because he associated Carmel, doubtless, with his predecessor, Elijah, 'my God is Yahweh'.

Something very moving about all this, b&s, I propose as Christadelphians, we are realists, we're not romantic people, we don't believe in such things as holy ground or anything like that I suppose, but you know when you go there you can't help but be moved by the very fact that there's the territory where people lived and moved that you love, and they mean more to you than life itself, because they present to us the possibility of eternal life if we can emulate their example. And Elisha must have felt that way, and there he was going pass continually, and she's urging him to eat bread. And you know, he came in quite often, and we read in verse 9 she said, 'Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually'. You notice, b&s, she said unto her husband, he didn't perceive it; she perceived it and she perceived that this was a holy man of God after many visits. She wasn't one of those people, you know, just overcome by men, because they're men nor overcome by a friendly face as a casual acquaintance, but he passed there often, and she said, 'look, I perceive that this is the holy man of God'. Notice this is the first and only time that that word 'holy' is attached to Elisha's title as the man of God, and he's called the man of God something like 33 times in the record, but she perceives he was a holy man of God. He was separate, he was dedicated, absolutely dedicated to his task, and he impressed the woman of Shunem. And she said to her husband, and he was so busy perhaps, reaping in the fields and keeping up his position that it hadn't dawned on him, that he was a holy man of God. And the husband in this story seems to be, as I've said before, to be under a shadow and a cloud; you don't hear much of him, she hid a lot of things from him. She perceived a lot of things in her heart as married, and she pondered them! but she didn't tell him, but now she had perceived that this was a holy man of God, and she suggested, not he, that they make him a little chamber on the wall.

Now this is interesting, because the word 'little chamber' b&s, is quite interesting, you see the Hebrew word for 'little chamber' is the word 'aliyah', and you've all at one time or another contributed to Youth Aliyah, I hope, and the word 'aliyah' means 'going up'; so if you migrate to Australia we say that you're an immigrant, but if you went to Israel as an Israelite and migrated there you would be one who had gone up, you would be in the first aliyah or the second aliyah. The first aliyah they designate as those people who went up to Israel before the second World War, but the second aliyah are those who went up to Israel after the second World War, and youth aliyah are the youth who are going up into Israel; and it wouldn't matter, b&s, if they were coming from the top of Mt. Everest, they are going up when they go to Israel, that's as far as the Jews are concerned anyway, they are always 'aliyah' they are always going up, and we are going down when anyone leaves to go to Australia, but anywhere else it is going up!

And so she was going to build a little 'aliyah' with a wall, and what they did, of course, as the RSV has it, they built a roof chamber with walls. They built it on top of the house! he was on top of that house! Now you see, the Jews constructed their houses in accordance with the Law of Moses. And they had certain specifications as how to build certain houses; they didn't have to build them this way but this was one type of construction. And we won't turn this reference up but in Deuteronomy 22 and verse 8 we read that they built there houses with flat roofs. And if they had a house with a flat roof, the Law stipulated that they had to build it with a battlement around it, because the

LORD didn't want anyone to have an accident. It was quite practical you know, the Law, now these houses with flat roofs we also learn from the scriptures, had an outside staircase, so if a man came home from his work in the fields, he could if he wished go to the rooftop of his house without anybody in the house knowing he was there. So that Jesus said, 'Let him that is upon the housetop return not again into the house to collect his things', how could he do that if he didn't have an outside staircase? he couldn't. And what was the purpose of this? Well, b&s, the purpose of the flat roof with the outside staircase and the battlement was, that anybody had the opportunity at any time, to come home to their own homes, and without letting their family know, they could snatch a few moments of privacy by going onto the rooftop, by going up (aliyah) to the top of that roof, and there they could use that area for meditation and for prayer. And it's remarkable that when Peter received his great commission to go and get Cornelius by seeing a sheet let down from heaven by four corners, he was on the housetop praying. He was up there doing the right thing; it is also very sad to note that when David looked at Bathsheba, he was on the housetop too! obviously not praying. But any rate, be it as it may, the idea was that she built this little 'aliyah' a going up, and he was always on top of that house. And that was interesting!

They gave him some furniture, they gave him a bed (he got some sleep, they gave him a table (and he's got to eat) she gave him a stool (I suppose he was allowed to sit down) and they gave him a lampstand. Simple, it was all that he needed, nothing more, nothing less; she was a great woman, they were in good circumstances but that was all that was necessary. But I want to draw your attention to one of those articles of furniture that they gave him, I want you to look at that stool; you know the word in the Hebrew is 'kisse', (she didn't give him a kiss) but she gave him a stool 'kisse' that's the way you'd pronounce it and spell it in English. B&S, that word is rather an important word, it is always, invariably used in the sense of a 'throne'. Now I'll tell you how it's rendered, it's only rendered 'stool' once, here; it's rendered 7 times 'seat' and you can turn everyone of those references up and you'll find it in reference to an important person. In the 7 times it's rendered 'seat' and the rest of the time in the scripture, it's rendered 124 times 'a throne'. That was no ordinary stool that they gave him, she gave him a throne and he went up and sat on his throne and he was head over that house. And make no mistake about this, that was done deliberately by that Shunammite, and when her son died she knew exactly where to take him. She knew exactly where to take him, she took him up, she laid him on the prophet's bed because to her, that was reaching unto God. Remarkable, that woman had perceived that we've got in our midst 'a holy man of God', no doubt about that! He had a lampstand up there, b&s, he was passing by him continually, he was a busy man, but I can tell you this, it's my opinion that a lot of oil was burnt in that lampstand; and a little light would flicker on the rooftop in that house of Shunem. You could see a little ecclesia there and that light would light that room, b&s, in which a holy man of God would have been pouring over His Father's Word, and over the work he'd been commissioned to do, feeling perfectly comfortable at home in peace and quiet in the home of Shunem, knowing that underneath of him there was a great woman, whose faith was dominating that household.

And as Elisha contemplated these things, of course, as he lay there, we read in verse

11, 'And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there'. He lay there and the very inference tells us he was thinking, he was lying there thinking, and he was thinking of that great woman underneath of him. 'He said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite', (Gehazi, we've met him at last; this is the first mention of Gehazi, b&s, I won't tell you all about him now, I'll give you a little character sketch of him later on, but at this stage, Gehazi is an undeveloped hypocrite). He has a rather peculiar name, Gehazi, 'the valley of vision', and that's important too, as you'll see later on because one of the prophets uses that word. The valley of vision=Gehazi, we'll leave him at that and we'll come back to him in the story of Naaman the Syrian. But for the moment he's called by Elisha, 'go and call this Shunammite', now notice the way in which both Elisha and the woman recognize their own in positions; there is no familiarity here, there is absolute respect and love. Now look at this! he's lying on his bed, he calls Gehazi and he says 'go and call that Shunammite' and we read that 'she stood before him', but she didn't, because he had to tell Gehazi 'go tell her and ask her what we'll do for her'. He had to bring her message back, 'nothing'; so you see, when it says she stood before him, she didn't really, not literally, she was outside the door. She was lower down and there was a mediator between her and Elisha; she respected his position, he recognized hers, and as great as she was, b&s, there was one greater up on that roof! He was over her, he was above, he was going up, he was 'aliyah' and she recognized that and he was on a throne!

And as great as she was, there he was greater! he was 'the salvation of God', and so when she stood before him, she stood before Elisha's representative, even as the children of Israel when they stood before Yahweh, stood before His priests. And such was the position which Elisha held, and which the woman humbly acknowledges great as she was. Now you imagine if you had comfortable circumstances and you provided a home for a brother who was passing by continually, well, you'd expect him to come out and talk to you! I mean to say, you set this place up and gave him a table and a bed and a candlestick and a stool and all that he requires, and I mean, he has to reciprocate! , I mean he's got to come and talk! Never, with the Shulammite; and she it was that had set him up there, b&s, this was her view of him. Make no mistake about that ! and she respected his position, and I think it's quite important as the story unfolds. Elisha said, 'you go and tell her' he said to Gehazi, 'behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care'. Now, that word 'careful' is interesting, it literally means 'shudder with terror', now it literally means that, but of course, in every place where it's used it doesn't have that extreme meaning, because it's used in Isaiah 66 which our bro. chairman used in his prayer, 'those that tremble at My Word', the word 'tremble' is that word 'careful'. And what does that 66th chapter of Isaiah say? 'that God doesn't require the great sacrifices, 'the cattle on a thousand hills are His, the rivers of oil are His', as the other prophet said, what God requires is a humble and a contrite heart and somebody that shudders at His Word', takes Him at His Word, and trembles at the power of it, b&s, and wouldn't do a thing in their lives, if they could help it, that would disgrace that Word. And that's how she stood before Elisha. She'd be very careful for him, she'd tremble at his presence, because she knew that was a holy man of God. What a different attitude she has from the young men at Beth-el, what a contrast!

And so he sends a message to her, what can we do for this woman? Well, you see he was on good terms with two men in Israel and for good reason; he was on good terms with Jehoram and the captain of the host, very good terms. And why? Well, he'd just been across to Moab with them, and they'd marched around the bottom of the Dead Sea, Jehoram and Israel, Jehoshaphat and Judah, and the king of Edom (what an unholy alliance that was!) and the three kings joined together to battle against Moab and if it hadn't been for the intervention of Elisha, they'd all have died of thirst in the wilderness. So he finds himself on terms with the king and the captain of the host, and well he might be! So he said to the Gehazi to say to her, 'Look, we'll speak a word to the king! and to the captain of the host' offering her two things, offering her a great social position with the king, or if she didn't want that, he would give her guaranteed protection from the captain of the host. So either of the two, he said, 'I don't care, I'll speak to both men!' so she could have great social standing with the king or she can have absolute protection from the captain of the host. So out went Gehazi, with this sweeping promise and of course, to the eastern people this was the absolute, if someone would talk of you with the king, well, you were made! And Gehazi comes back and he asks, 'which one?' He answers, None! she's not interested! because she had a social position she was quite happy with, she dwelt among her own people. That was her answer, and as great as she was, b&s, she never had any difficulty in living with the people on the plain of Jezreel. She was alright; that's all she required in this life. 'Well, what about the captain of the host? didn't she need protection?' Protection! she had sitting on her roof, the salvation of God! what else could she want? So she sent Gehazi back, 'I don't want anything'.

And then you see a very moving drama; you see Elisha talking to Gehazi, and saying, 'I'm embarrassed about all this; look, this has been tremendous, surely Gehazi, there's something this woman requires!' and you know, b&s, because Gehazi would have had more access to the lower part of that house, going down there perhaps for Elisha, and because he was the go-between between that woman and Elisha, (Elisha's contact was not that intimate with that woman at this stage). She had perceived that he was a holy man of God, true, but Elisha seems to be so preoccupied that he didn't see this woman as Gehazi saw her; but Gehazi, b&s, in his keen little mind, he had seen what it was that was eating that woman out, which she wouldn't tell anybody. She wouldn't breathe it to a soul, but it was eating her very vitals out, (and if you don't believe that, you listen when we get further into the story). It was eating that woman out day and night, day and night, and she wouldn't express herself and what she wanted was a boy! She wanted a boy! and Gehazi knew that, and he'd seen it! but she hadn't told him that. 'She's got no child' said Gehazi, 'and her husband is old'. She hadn't said anything about that, and she didn't want to say anything about it, but this is what was eating her out. And the maternal instincts in that woman were yearning, b&s, and not only the maternal instincts but spiritual instincts were yearning in that woman to bring to the birth; and nobody could bring to the birth, and there in and out, day and night till Gehazi came back and told Elisha those two things, she's got no child and her husband is old.

This was clearly inferring that she was not old, it was possible with her, but there was no genitive power on his part, where was it going to come from? where was the power

going to come from? And this would be in her mind constantly, the thing she wanted most and her husband couldn't provide it, where then was she going to get the power? And she entertained these hopes day and night but she never said anything to anyone. And Elisha brings her back in verse 15, and he said, 'Call her. And when he had called her, (this time, b&s,) she stands in the door'. Very expressive! this time Elisha wants to speak personally to her; she won't come through the door but she stands in the threshold of that door, and Elisha I believe, would probably be still laying down, meditating and thinking.

Speaking from his bed as she stood in that door, he said to her, verse 16, 'About this season'(and the margin says, 'set time') according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son'. Now, I want to interpret these words in accordance with the original Hebrew, so you'll appreciate the force of them, and the way they would have struck this woman. You see, he said this, (and you can imagine him lying there, b&s, and she standing there in modesty and humility, perhaps with her head bowed, not even daring to look in that room where there's a holy man of God) and the words coming through that door, 'About this season, at this set time, according to the time of life' , now that expression is a beautiful expression because it literally means 'according to the time of reviving', and what he was talking about was the time of spring, and Rotherham renders it that way, 'according to the time of spring'. The RSV doesn't render it spring there but it renders it spring in another place, agreeing with the translation of Rotherham, but that's what the Hebrew means anyway, it's the time of reviving, when things revive, b&s; and at the set time when things revive God would give her a child. And the time of spring was the time of Passover and the springtime (if you want to appreciate the springtime in Israel, if you want to see land revive in the time of spring) go to Shunem, and you couldn't find a better place; and if ever there was a glorious picture of things coming to life in the land of Israel, it's on the plain of Jezreel, 'God sows'. And she wanted a godly seed, and there was no one on the earth that could supply her with one and her husband was old. And according to the time of spring, it is the exact phrase the angels used with Sarah and Abraham, 'according to the time of life (springtime) the time of the Passover.

And then Elisha, being a much more tenderhearted man than Elijah, a man, b&s, who appreciated human feelings, used another expression which went right through that woman. He didn't say 'thou shalt embrace a son', as if she'd embrace him just like that; he said 'about this set time in the spring, you will be embracing a son', and when he said that, that woman went to pieces! and the expressions that she used next, illustrate clearly her feelings. She went to pieces, and she just burst out, 'do not lie unto thy handmaid', and out came all the those pent-up feelings just pouring out of her; do not lie and she meant by that, 'don't fill me with deluded hopes; don't fill me with deluded hopes'(but I want you to know what she said with that) She said, 'nay, my lord, man of God, don't fill me with deluded hopes', and look at the stuttering way that's put. You take out the word 'thou' it's in italics, she says 'no, my adon, man of God, don't fill me with deluded hopes', and that's how she expressed herself. But those deluded hopes come to fruition and the next year, when Carmel's finger felt the rain of spring, b&s, felt the latter rains of spring, and all the plain of Jezreel burst into greenery, and the poppies of Galilee which we saw ourselves, streaking the green with the reds, and the yellows and

the whites of the lilies, when Galilee and Esdraelon came to life, a boy was born in that house! according to the word of 'the salvation of God'. And notice Elisha, the name Elisha is used there, according to the word of 'the salvation of God'; and there was a boy in that house!

It was a remarkable time, no doubt about that! but the story continues 'and when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers'. When the child was grown, how old was he? No idea, except to say this, he was old enough to go out on his own into the fields, and young enough to still sit on his mother's knee; so I suppose just guessing around about 4 to 6 years say, this little boy as all little boys like to see their father's work, 'it came to pass he went out to his father' where did he go? to the reapers. Reapers? when do they reap, b&s? isn't it at the time of reviving? it was at least, late spring or early summer, and the time of another Passover, and he was going to die. And this in the time of reviving when once again Galilee and Esdraelon or Jezreel was clothed in green, the time of reviving she lost that child, and now came a challenge of faith, b&s, that she had to surmount and not only her but Elisha had to surmount with her! because he was ignorant of that which was going to happen. God had not revealed it to him, and there was an enormous challenge of faith on the part of God here, with Elisha and the woman of Shunem.

The little boy goes out to his father and the reapers. It's the time of reviving and isn't it tragic, b&s, that at a time of reviving and reaping and harvesting in Israel, and especially on the plain of Jezreel, there would be an abundant of crops that it produces, why the harvest time? it was spring, it was the Passover season, it was the time of rejoicing, it was the time of reviving but here is death! Have a look at the 9th chapter of Isaiah, here's a time of rejoicing and harvest, starting at verse 2, 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace'. And there in Israel when God had multiplied the nation and He'd multiplied the joy as in the time of harvest when the increase was coming forth, there was the One spoken of who would be 'a child is given', a son is come to Israel; and the government was going to increase with Him, and it was a time of great harvest for the nation. And the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ whilst it may not have been in the spring, was certainly an indication of a time of reviving in Israel, and a time of a great harvest to come, and there was joy with the angels in heaven, there was joy in the fields of Bethlehem, b&s, there was joy everywhere! But that joy was turned to mourning and sadness as he was laid in the darkness of the tomb!

And here on the plain in Shunem, at a time when the great harvest was being reaped, and all was joyful and happy, the boy is dying. Now look what happens! In 2 Kings chapter 4 and verse 19 we read, as the little boy is running amongst the shearers and reapers he cries out to his father, 'my head, my head' probably clutching his forehead, racing over to his father, 'my head, my head'. What does his father say? Go to your

mother! 'Hey, listen boy, bring that cart over here, hey, what about those oxen, what about reaping those sheaves; never mind the lad!' Go unto your mother! that's the attitude of dad! get him out of the way, we're busy! And they took him to his mother, and 'she sat him upon her knees until noon and he died'. You know, what a tragic thing, she sat him upon her knees as the sun rose up to its zenith, b&s, and she would have been sitting out there or inside, perhaps, meditating upon the mighty principles of Yahweh, praying fervently for the life of that child, realizing that the boy was sick; she wouldn't have sat there with him on her knees if he wasn't sick. But she sat there with him on her knees and as she watched the sun rise to its zenith, she would have been praying earnestly, praying earnestly, and at noon the boy died when the sun was at its peak, and wouldn't she remember where she was, looking at the plain of Esdraelon, looking at mount Carmel. There was a challenge to her, b&s, because there was another prayer that was issued from Carmel, that of lips, mad lips saying 'O Baal, hear us! and at noon nothing happened! but now, Yahweh had given her a son; Baal had naught at his prophets, but at noon when the sun was at the zenith of its glory, the boy gone! why? why? why would he be gone? You think of it, think of it, why? why? why would he be gone?

And this would have been the question that would have flooded into her mind; it was a tremendous challenge of her faith, couldn't understand it! but you know, b&s, she didn't panic! She got hold of herself, she took full control of herself, she was a great woman and she took that boy straight up, she went up 'aliyah', and she put him on the bed of the man of God. She knew that was the place to lay him, why? She had doubtless, heard about what Elijah did when he raised the widow's son; he put him on his own bed. Why? Because you see, b&s, with the widow's son of Zarephath, when Elijah raised that boy, he identified himself with that boy to prove to the widow of Zarephath, that he was a man of God. And when the boy arose it was virtually a resurrection in the mind of the widow of Zarephath of Elijah, and she said, 'now I know by this, that thou art a man of God'. But this woman already believed that; she already believed he was a holy man of God and she knew to take him up there, (aliyah) was to get him close to God; he couldn't get any closer than lying on that bed, because it was on that bed that the voice had said, 'at this set time, in the spring, you'll be cuddling and embracing a son'. And she took him up there where the voice had come from and laid him right on the bed where that voice had issued that wonderful promise; she couldn't get him any closer to the power of God than that!

And then she hurries down, and I want you to note what she did. She shut the door upon him! The words 'the door' are in italics, you'll notice in verse 21, the Hebrew says 'she shut him', she shut upon him, she locked him up; she hide him, b&s, she hid him in that little chamber; then she sent a message to her husband, for the ass to be sent, 'that I might run to the man of God and return'. And he comes in or sends a message and says, 'Well, what are you going to the man of God for?' It never occurred to him that his little boy who had said, 'my head, my head' and he had shoved him off to his mother, would it have dawned on you that there was something wrong with that boy? Wouldn't you have said, 'what's the hurry?' 'how's the lad?' wouldn't you have said that? Would have been the most natural thing in the world; all he could say was 'well, I can't

understand this, what are you going today for? there's no meeting, the meetings are on the new moons and the sabbath? and in that statement, b&s, we have, I believe, set before us, the fact of the father's lack of interest and the recognition that his wife was a regular attender at those meetings. Now you note that, it's clearly inferred, the recognition that she was a regular attender at those meetings, on the new moon and on the sabbath. And on the new moons, the beginning of the months and on the sabbaths, they multiplied the burnt offering, the offering of dedication, in which that offering spoke of absolute dedication to God, with the head and the fat and the flesh placed upon the altar, publicly consumed in service to God, and that formed the basis of those meetings. So the Psalmist could say 'blow up the trumpet on the new moon, on our solemn feast days', on our solemn feast days, and she was a regular attender at those meetings; and she was going to run to the man of God.

And when he reminded her that it was neither new moon nor sabbath, she answered him with one word, 'Shalom'. Just that, Shalom, which means 'peace', and has the idea, of course, in this place, of 'alright'. Alright, I know you're right, you're perfectly right, it's not a meeting day! Shalom, and not another word was said; why wouldn't there be another word said, b&s? because there wouldn't be any doubt in the husband's mind of the absolute determination of that woman to go. He didn't argue with her, Shalom was enough; there was an absolute determination for her to go, and she went. She got a hold of the ass with the servant, he put her on the ass, and he was obliged to run before that ass. They were going to travel 15 mile to Carmel, and she said, 'don't you stop that animal unless I say, and you go as hard as you can go and don't stop unless I say'. And up they went and I reckon this is a moving picture and I can see Elisha sitting there, b&s, and I can see him on that plain as clear as I can see you, and I can see that Shunammite coming right up that 15 mile track. And situated behind her was mount Tabor, I can see Moreh, the hills of Gilboa and her coming towards him, right up the finger of Carmel, and he said, 'Listen, look, there's that Shunammite' and Elisha knew that this woman wouldn't be riding up there on a day when there wasn't a meeting for nothing!

'Run to her' he said to Gehazi, say to her 'is it well with thee?' (is it 'peace' with thee, he uses the word 'shalom' three times) is it peace with your husband? is it peace with your child? and the undeveloped hypocrite, Gehazi, running up to her, and her not slacking her ride and he running alongside and saying, is it peace with her husband? peace with her? peace with her child? She's not even looking at him, eyes blinded with tears looking at Carmel, saying 'Shalom'; that's all she said, Shalom, she's only spoken two words since that child had died, except to send a message for the ass. Two words and in both cases she said, 'shalom'. And she went up to the hill, and what a picture! up to the hill to mount Carmel to the man of God, and took him by the feet. Gehazi wants to interfere, b&s, because he's one of those people you know, that's very, very conscious of his master's dignity! but completely unfeeling for anybody who needs care and attention. He was like the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, who were forever trying to keep the Lord's way clear of all the dirty lepers and people who were blind, and people who were cluttering up the highway and the Lord was forever telling them, 'leave them alone'. And Elisha used exactly the same words as the Lord Jesus Christ when he said,

'let her alone'! And those were the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in the 12th chapter of John, in respect to another woman when they wanted to push her out of the way, He said, 'let her alone', because He like Elisha, b&s, the salvation of God, felt for people.

And Elisha himself was puzzled, what was it all about? and she wasn't going to say. She was beyond words, and you know, when you look at this thing, you think, alright, this is a bit of drama; you think, well, why is it all this dramatic? But look, you've just got to live this record; you take it, on mount Carmel, b&s, there's a scene enacted by Elijah, but there's now a scene enacted by Elisha. Look at the difference! and look at the ministrations of these two men; here's Elijah up there, alright, he's got his servant, he's got all Israel around him, he's got the 400 prophets of Baal with all their paraphernalia; and there's colour, there's activity, there's noise and there's all this going on. There's fervent prayers by the prophets of Baal, there's beating of drums, cutting of lances, yelling and screaming, there's Israel murmuring and watching on, Elijah comes to his turf, there's a fervent prayer, there's fire from heaven, there's a cloud coming on, there's rain, there's terrific activity, but all there is on top of Carmel now, is two people struggling with the power of the still, small voice, challenging their faith, not the faith of Baal, not the faith of Ahab, not faith of Jezebel, the faith of the woman of Shunem, and the faith of Elisha who both couldn't understand why it was that a boy had to die!! Why was it? and they were struggling with the greater power than Elijah struggled with, the power of conviction in self.

And Elisha and this woman hanging onto him, and then she burst out with her feelings again, being a woman of few words she said, in verse 28, 'did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?', and that phrase 'do not deceive me' is a little different; the word means, did I say 'don't draw me out', don't draw me out. She didn't want to be drawn out, b&s, you see, Gehazi had drawn her out, she didn't want that; she had hopes in her heart that she knew could never be realize. She didn't want to entertain hopes that were impossible to fulfill them, she was a realist, she was a person would wanted to pin her faith on reality, she didn't want to try and hope for something for herself that was impossible and she tried to suppress those feelings. She didn't talk to the husband about it evidently, she didn't talk to Gehazi about it (he just calculated the thing; she was young and he was old, they had no child, he worked it out by her demeanour), but nobody else knew because she said, 'oh, why did you draw me out?' and that's all she could say to him because, having had that hope drawn out of her, she said 'my adon, man of God' and in those titles she expressed a hope that what he said would happen, it had happened and now, look, now this insufferable thing! that she had got what she longed for and God had taken it. And that takes a lot of faith to overcome, b&s.

And Elisha did a thing, I believe, in haste without thinking, he turned to Gehazi and he said to him, 'gird up thy loins'; there was another man who girded up his loins from that spot, and who ran the almost exact course of Gehazi, and that was Elijah. But look at the difference, there is only three people here but the struggle is enormous; so Gehazi goes and Elisha puts into Gehazi's hand a staff. Now there's a very moving phrase here and if you think that we're over dramatizing this, you listen to this; there's a very moving

phrase here which the Word of God just inserts to tell us of the great drama and feelings that were being exercised on this occasion. Here's Gehazi and he sets sail down the slopes of Carmel to the floor of the valley and then he's got a 15 mile run to Shunem, straight down the valley. And as he sped down that mountain, (I'm marking the sisters now, never mind about the brethren); I'm asking the sisters who had a little boy back in that home, dead, who was the fulfillment of all their hopes and aspirations and who had come after years of pent up feelings (I'm asking the sisters) what would you have done? And I know the answer, you would have run for your life with Gehazi! But she didn't, and the scripture says in words that are absolutely eloquent, 'and the mother of the child said'; do you see what God is trying to tell us? that woman is never given a name in the scripture; she's called 'the great woman of Shunem', she's called 'the woman', she's called 'the Shunammite' (and that she's called regularly) and there is only one variation from that, and that's there, and there she's called 'the mother of the child'.

And there was the struggle, b&s, maternal instincts vs. the still small voice of God. And the battle was not won between a prophet of God and 400 idolatrous prophets, but the battle was raging inside of one person, the mother of the child. And she hung to his feet and she wasn't going to let those feet go in any other direction than hers; and as she hung to those feet, b&s, there was a passionate appeal just by her clinging there, and as Elisha saw Gehazi go, fully expecting the woman, no doubt, to race off with him, but he didn't see that at all. He felt that grip tighten doubtless, and she hung on; and the mother of the child then said, 'As Yahweh liveth, and as you live' (and she saw the two of them as one) 'I'm not moving unless you go!' And there, look at the scene! Gehazi with a staff, the woman of Shunem and following on behind, 'the salvation of God', running down that plain; what a different scene it was with Elijah out in front, behind the royal chariot of Ahab and all Israel running down that plain, the whole lot of them racing into Jezreel behind a shower of rain; now just three people. The first man obeying a command he didn't understand, anyway he had no faith, and there was a dead stick in the hand of a hypocrite, who just went in ceremoniously and laid the stick on the face of the child. And he came back with a message, 'he's not awake', and the word 'awake' means 'reviving time'; it won't work, it's the same root word, there's 'no reviving time'. The word of the salvation of God is wrong, there is no resurrection, and the staff was as dead as the boy and the boy was as dead as the staff, because there was no faith in Gehazi. And when he put the staff on the face of the child, the record says in verse 31, 'there was neither voice nor hearing' and that was the exact phrase that was used by the record, when the prophets of Baal prayed to Baal, there was neither voice nor hearing.

And the boy had died at noon! and there was the challenge of the woman's faith; there was a dead stick, and undeveloped hypocrite, a dead body, no voice, no hearing, no reviving time; was the salvation of God right? is there going to be a resurrection? and Elisha comes in, he goes up and he shuts the door upon the two of them. And now there's going to be a struggle, b&s, and it's not a struggle with mouth to mouth resuscitation as some seem to think because he put his mouth on his mouth; the struggle I believe in the mind of Elisha was to identify himself with that child, in a manner that he could so powerfully and positively identify himself, that the Spirit of the

still small voice which moved in him, might move in that child. And so Rotherham puts it, not that he put his mouth on the mouth of the child as we have in verse 34, 'put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes', but as the Hebrew has it, 'put his own mouth on the mouth of the child, his own eyes on the eyes of the child, his own hands on the hands of the child, and there was voice and there was seeing and there was action which had permeated the life of Elisha, and those actions and those voices and that seeing, b&s, he was going to identify himself with that son. And he put himself upon the child waiting, waiting; now look what the record says in verse 35, 'Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him.' You think of the drama; you're the woman of Shunem, sisters, you've got children that you love, you're the woman of Shunem, you're down in the house; the door of the upper room opens, the aliyah, the man of God comes down, no one says a word; he walks to and fro and she's watching, to and fro. And the very record is indicating to us the intensity of that drama, she knows full well by the fact that he's walking to and fro that it hadn't worked, or at least, not yet!

And back he goes, he goes up again! What an enormous test of faith, and he goes up into that room until the boy sneezed seven times; the number of the covenant, and the life, the breath of life was breathed into his nostrils, and the word 'sneezed' has the idea of 'respiration'(seven times) and the breath of life was going into him, not once, b&s, not twice but seven times, completely and life was restored completely to that boy. And he sat up and he went down, and he gave the boy to his mother; she fell upon her knees in adoration and worship to God, and it says she 'took up her son and went out'. And Paul says in Hebrew 11 and verse 35, 'by faith women received their dead back to life again'. By faith, and there's not a thing mentioned in the 11th chapter of Hebrews with the appendage of 'by faith' that doesn't have within it, b&s, the meaning that that was not done easily! By faith, women received their dead back to life again, and there's one of them; she was a great woman of Shunem!

And as we close the pages upon the story of her life, let us reflect in the few hours that are left before the night, upon the grandeur of that character, and let us see, sisters, that whatever tragedies and sorrows of life that may overcome us, whatever problems, brethren, may come our way, let us see this, that there is no power on earth apart from the power of God that can help us! And whether we be the mother of the child or whether we be the brethren who are intimately connected with anything of this nature, let us remember this, it's no good running anywhere except to God! and 'as Yahweh liveth, and as thou liveth, I will not leave thee', and she stuck to the 'salvation of God' and even then, b&s, there still was that patient waiting for the power to operate, but it operated, and he was raised from the dead. And joy came again to that house; the woman had to leave later on because of the dearth. For seven years she was away, but at the end of the seven years she returned to her inheritance, settled down on the great plain of Jezreel, and there they would have lived, of course, in prosperity and happiness. And what a tremendous story that is, and let us remember, b&s, as we walk through life, there are people like that who preceded us, who are every encouragement for us to overcome all problems, all difficulties and to lay hold on the salvation of God!