

File No. 77

II KINGS 4:1–7; 38–44; 6:1–7

A WIDOW'S POT OF OIL / STORIES FROM THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

(SBS Bk 3 Story Nos. 21 & 24)

Story Notes

The prophetic community, which had gathered around Elijah, may not have had wide support, and their practical needs quickly threw them back on God. Elisha moved from place to place, including the memorable Mt Carmel, and was careful for the needs of those who trusted God. He was also able to speak to the king and commander personally. These accounts tell us about godly people who were grateful to God for his mercy and how God provided for the prophet and his company. There is not a time in Scripture, apart from the days of Moses and of Christ, when we are told of so many miracles being performed. God was demonstrating to Israel that he still lived among them as their gracious provider. By this, he encouraged the faith and hope of his faithful people.

Selling the sons of a widow seems unjust to us, but it was within the law of the time. Payment of debt was a high priority in Israel. The woman's debt was not forgiven but she was enabled to repay it. Elisha asked what she had in the house, and, with that and some borrowing from her neighbours, he called her to participate in the miracle. She found that God's providing was as bountiful as her need. (Cf. the earlier miracle of a similar kind in I Kings 17:15.)

Stories from the school of the prophets

Famine came to Israel again. Elisha showed the prophetic community that, even if the only remaining fruits were poisonous, and even if there were few in the land who brought their gifts to the Lord's servants, they could be fed. When Jesus came, he taught his disciples, not only that they could be fed, but that they could feed the multitudes (Matt. 14:16).

We are encouraged by these narratives, as servants of Christ, not to expect great things in this world which goes about its life as though God did not matter, but, to expect great things of God who will not leave himself without a witness to his living among us.

The calling of Elisha was to be a prophet; nevertheless he remained careful for the welfare of those around him. Perhaps this is reflected in the desire of the prophets to have him come with them while they gathered timber for their residence. When confronted with the loss of a borrowed axehead, he was sure of the goodness and power of God in his care for the ordinary needs and emergencies of his prophets. Jesus provided for his disciples in similar fashion (Matt. 17:27).

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