

2nd Kings Chapter 4 - John Karmelich

1. The first thing I want to say is that this is an upbeat chapter. To be honest, after several chapters about God's judgment and the last lesson focusing on Israelites being at war, I figured we're way overdue for an upbeat lesson. The good news is we change the focus from what happened to the nation of Israel to what is happening with the prophet Elisha. Specifically we are going to read of five miracles that he performs and benefits the lives of those he encounters.
2. OK, so someone named Elisha performed some miracles long ago. How does any of this affect my life and what I am dealing with today? Great question, which just happens to lead right into my lesson title: "How do we increase our faith in God". I heard a quote in preparation for this lesson that I can't get out of my head: "I love to read about other people increasing their faith in God, and I love to teach about increasing one's faith in God. What's hard to do is to actually go and increase my own faith in God." (Paraphrased of David Guzik's comment on this chapter.)
 - a) Translation: This chapter gives wonderful examples about how we should go about to increase our faith and trust in God. It's easy to say and teach, it's hard to actually do for all of us. What I hope to accomplish in this lesson is how each of go about increasing our faith and trust in God through the examples given in this lesson.
 - b) In other words, this lesson is not about learning about five specific miracles that benefited the lives of a handful of people millenniums ago. It's about learning how God will bless our own lives as we grow in our faith in Him. Therefore, if you want your life to be more blessed by God, you've come to the right lesson. I promised this lesson was going to be positive and I'm sticking to that promise.
3. With that said, let me summarize the five miracles presented in this chapter and how they teach us about increasing our faith in God:
 - a) The first is about a woman who is in financial trouble and asks Elisha for help. Elisha tells her to go collect as many jars and containers as she can. Then she pours her only valuable possession left, a jar of oil into all of those empty containers. The miracle is the oil didn't run out until the last jar was filled. The increase in faith had to do with asking all of her neighbors for all the containers they could spare as well as watching that oil pouring.
 - b) The next miracle is about a different woman who was probably barren. She builds a place for Elisha to live. Elisha told her that God would give her a baby son by next year's time. She has an older husband and let me say this delicately, she trusts God enough to plan so that in a short time span she gets pregnant. Later in this story, a second miracle occurs as the baby boy dies. She calls for Elisha to come see her again. He lays on the boy and yes, we have the second recorded miracle in the bible of bringing someone back to life again after they have died. The faith here had to do with the woman not willing to give up on the son being dead. She laid him in Elisha's bed in his room and worked to get Elisha to come back to heal the dead boy. Again, we see a growth in faith here.
 - c) The final story is about a pot of stew being made for a large group of prophets. To put it simply, someone put an ingredient in the stew that others realized was poisonous if it was eaten in large doses. Elisha adds some flour to the pot and the miracle is the stew is good again. The growth in faith had to do with these prophets trusting in whatever Elisha did and their willingness to eat the stew. The final miracle of this chapter has to do with some food being able to feed far more people than was there was actual food. It is designed to remind the Christian reader of the comparison to Jesus feeding the 5,000 people and 4,000 people on different occasions. In other words we have an increase in these people's faith as they are willing to trust that there is enough food for everyone and even be stuffed by what was given to them.
 - d) To sum up the whole chapter, we have five miracles in three stories. Each story shows how people's trust and faith in God was increased by trusting in what Elisha did here.

4. Speaking of saying something positive let me explain how this story ties to our trust in Jesus. I've always held the view that every aspect of Jesus life, death, ministry and His Second Coming can be found somewhere in the Old Testament. That doesn't mean "this" Old Testament passage says Jesus will do "this" and "that" Old Testament passage says Jesus will do "that". It's about patterns. The stories we read in the Old Testament shows patterns that ties in some way to what God has done for us through Jesus in those historical events as well as future events.
 - a) My point is the miracles that Jesus performed are predicted by the pattern we see by these miracles done here by Elisha as well as his mentor Elijah. Just as Jesus raised people from the dead, so did these two people. Just as Jesus miraculously helped the lives of specific individuals, so did these two. As Jesus multiplied food so all could eat, so did Elisha in this chapter of the Old Testament. If one ever wonders where the predictions are made about Jesus performing miracles, we're at that location in Scripture. That's my sole point.
 - b) Even with that said, the point of this chapter is not to look at this or that cute miracle that Elisha performed. After all, all of the people who received these miracles eventually did die again, so that's not the point. What I'm convinced God wants us to get out of these stories is about people increased their faith by trusting in God to work. Like I said in the beginning, I believe it is easy to read and teach about others increasing their own faith in God, the challenge for all of us is to take steps to increase our own faith. That is what we are going to read and talk about in this lesson. With that said, time to get rolling.
5. Verse 1: The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves."
 - a) Whenever I begin a new chapter, it is always best to remember where we last left off, as to state once again, there were no chapter breaks in the original text.
 - b) Chapter 3 did involve Elisha, but the text was mostly about the kings of the two Israelite nations fighting against a neighboring country called Moab. The Israelites won because they trusted in God and did what God commanded them to do. In effect the focus of the story continues with the emphasis on what else Elisha did as opposed to what happened to the kings of Israel. We'll eventually get back to the fates of the Israelite kings in a few chapters, however, I promised some happiness today, and I'm sticking to that promise.
 - c) Therefore, the focus of this chapter is on some wonderful miracles that Elisha does for the average Israelites as opposed to just their kings. With that said, this chapter opens with the story of a widow of a prophet of God. She is rightfully complaining that as a widow it was difficult to pay the bills. In the Middle East back then, if one could not pay the debts one owes, a creditor had to right to take one's children as slaves to pay off those debts.
 - i) To state the obvious, she didn't want to lose her children to slavery. She is aware that Elisha has great powers of God and asks for his help.
 - ii) As to why we should care about this, we'll get to that in a short time.
6. Verse 2: Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil."
 - a) Notice Elisha does not say, "Who do I make the check out to", or "Let's do a fundraiser to help with your bills". Instead he wants this widow to trust God by asking what does she have that is of any value. It's kind of like someone complaining about the liabilities that they owe and the first thing an advisor might ask is, "What assets do you have that I can work with in order to offset those liabilities?" For us, our assets could be the ability to go and work in the first place or some other physical asset. The point is to start with what we do have and go from there.
 - b) I picture this woman thinking about it and saying in effect, the only thing I own that is worth selling is some oil (probably the kind used for cooking). If nothing else, it shows that God likes to work with what we have on hand, and use whatever assets we have in order to make a difference for Him or use our assets to increase our faith in Him.

7. Verse 3: Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few." ⁴ Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side."
- a) To set the scene, imagine living in a small town where everyone knows everyone. Now imagine having to go knock on everyone's door and begging them for every empty jar or container they could spare. I'm sure people were asking why she wanted to borrow them. I don't know if she told the truth about that. The point is she had enough faith not only in God, but in Elisha as God's prophet to go do what he said. She probably eventually got a roomful of empty containers to pour oil in all of them.
8. Verse 5: She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. ⁶ When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.
- a) Here is this woman and her children without Elisha in the room. You can imagine how nervous she must have been to start pouring. She might even have told her friends what Elisha had said. That's why she went home by herself and shut the door so no one could actually see her do the pouring. I sort of picture her doing this slowly at first to see what would and would not come out of the original jar. After a few times, she was probably turning the original jar upside down to see if she could even empty it. It was not until the last empty jar was filled, the oil stopped flowing.
- b) Consider the fact the miracle only benefited this one woman and her family. No one else saw this occur. Yet it is recorded for us as I suspect Elisha kept some sort of diary that did become eventually incorporated into "Kings". The faith part is that it took courage for this woman to go ask every neighbor for spare jars. It took faith to trust that the oil would not stop pouring. Her faith that God is real and He cares about the lives of His people is clear here in this story.
- c) Now comes the tough question: Where is our pouring oil? When our problems mount up to the ceiling, why don't we get a prophet of God telling us to go collect some empty jars so we can have resources to solve our problems? First, remember that Jesus did not come to earth in order to solve everybody's problems. He came here to save our souls by telling us by completely trusting in Him we can be saved for all of eternity. Any miracle we get over and above that is a bonus and we can't count on those bonuses. What we can count on the fact that God cares for us and wants the best for our lives. He wants us to trust Him through our good and bad times so He can show His glory through us. Not by daily miracles like this, but by us being obedient to His word so we can go out to live a life to show others that trusting in God does lead to eternal life. That's the increase in our faith that God is interested in.
- i) Even with that said, once in a while God will work in some miraculous way in a person's life if for no other reason just to remind us that He's there. We can't count on such things happening to us daily. I can't explain why some people get special miracle cures and others have to suffer tremendously. I just know that God works His way and His timing. It is His world and His decision to make. Our job is just to trust in Him and let Him guide us for our glory.
- ii) With that said, time to get back to Elisha and this unnamed woman:
9. Verse 7: She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."
- a) You would think that Elisha would want to be there to watch the oil pour. Instead he is more interested in increasing the faith of this woman. Therefore, he left the scene. Here we read of this woman tracking down Elisha to tell him the "trick" worked. My guess is she was so excited, it didn't occur to her what to do next, which was to go trade the oil in the marketplace for what she needed to pay off the debts. Therefore, she asked Elisha what to do next and Elisha said just that. That's the end of this story as her faith in God increased.

10. Verse 8: One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. ⁹ She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. ¹⁰ Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."
- a) We now switch stories from a desolate woman to a "well-to-do" woman. If nothing else, we learn that God not only cares about the lives of the kings of Israel, but also all those who trust in Him. This includes desolate and those who have some resources.
 - b) As I thought about these verses, I kept thinking, why would this well to do woman even stop to give a meal for Elisha in the first place? Was she just the type of person who liked to help strangers? I know of people who like to keep small care packages in their cars so that they could hand them out to beggars as they pass. Maybe she was that type. I don't know if Elisha dressed differently than others or what was the reason why she choose to help him and not others, the point is she did. Little do we know the good that we choose to do to help who we think is desolate can come back to bless our own lives.
 - c) Whatever the back story, the point is this well to do woman realized that Elisha was a man of God (that is, a prophet) and she said to her husband, let us make a build a place for him to sleep when he comes to town. In the Middle East at that time, homes had flat roofs and it was common to have open patios on the roof to rest in the middle of the day. The point is she asks her husband to build an enclosed patio on the roof for Elisa. I sort of picture her husband as the kind of guy who loved to play with tools and build things. He agrees and the next thing we know there is an enclosed patio on the roof.
 - d) Stop for a moment and consider the faith of this woman. She is not really giving Elisha access to her house, but probably a ladder or stairwell leading to the roof. How willing would you or I be to build a room for a "traveling bum" that came to town? Even if we believed someone was a man of God, would we be willing to let someone like that live right next to us or above us? Not only does it show this woman's generosity, but also her willingness to trust God to help someone else who she realizes also trusts in God.
 - i) I'm wondering if she's thinking, "Hey this is a prophet, maybe we can be blessed by him in some way." Whatever her motivation, give her credit for her willingness to build this place for this stranger. With that said, let's read on in the story.
11. Verse 11: One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. ¹² He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. ¹³ Elisha said to him, "Tell her, `You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?' " She replied, "I have a home among my own people."
- a) Elisha realizes she went to all of this trouble and asks, "What can I do to repay you for all the trouble you went through to build me this place? I (Elisha) can get access to the king or to the head of the army. Do you want me to ask them something for you? She says in effect, I am "well-to-do", but thanks for asking. I'm fascinated that she didn't want to ask the king for some benefit for her life. She was the type of person who was happy with what she had and wasn't interested in more gain. I give her credit for that alone. She also cared about being a good servant of God, which is why she built the room addition in the first place. Never underestimate the little things we do to make a difference for God.
 - b) With that said, the role of the believer is to help others increase their faith in God so that together we can all live to worship Him and make a difference for Him in this world. So Elisha with that thought in mind, asks again, what can I do for you?
12. Verse 14: "What can be done for her?" Elisha asked. Gehazi said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old."
- a) At this point in the story we get introduced to a servant of Elisha named Gehazi. It's as if he raises his hand and says, "I know, she doesn't have a son, go bless her that way Elisha!"

- b) I'm tempted to make a joke her that the reason she was well to do, is because she didn't have to pay the high cost of raising children, but for all I know maybe she had daughters. One has to understand that in the Middle East culture (we're getting a lot of that in this lesson), to have a son, is very important. The idea is the family name continues. I know that for myself, I had to let go of the idea that God didn't want me to have a son. I grieved that through and I love my daughters dearly. Anyway, Elisha's assistant named Gehazi pointed out the fact that her husband is getting up there in age and there is no son in this family. Maybe Elisha could bless that family that way.
13. Verse 15: Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶ "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms." "No, my lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" ¹⁷ But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.
- a) Notice all the interest in "pleasing others" we have here: Elisha is interested in doing something in order to show his gratitude to this woman. The woman is interested in doing something to please her husband by having a child. Even the servant Gehazi is interesting is pleasing others and made that suggestion in the first place.
- b) Here is where the faith came into play. It's one thing to say, "I'm going to have a son in a relatively short time. It's another to say to one's spouse, "The man of God said at this time next year we're going to have a son, so let's get it on!" The point is this woman and her husband did act in faith based on what Elisha predicted and a year later she had a son.
- c) You may say, what's the big deal about that miracle? Older men and younger woman can still have babies. However, we don't know the back-story. Maybe they didn't have any children. Maybe she struggled to get pregnant. This is the type of woman who did like to please others. She wanted to make her husband happy and give him a son. She wanted to make Elisha happy and give him a place to live. Elisha appealed to her desire to please others in order to increase her faith. She did and a baby boy was eventually born.
- d) I also want to share that this type of story was personal to me. For years my wife and I tried to have a baby and couldn't. My wife suffered through a bunch of miscarriages. I also know of women who for some reason can't get pregnant. One of my wives oldest friends struggled for years when she was young. It ended up wrecking her marriage. Both she and her husband ended up marrying others and yes, both had babies after that. I'm just saying that God has the power to open and close the womb of who He wants at anytime. For us a big issue was when we had our two daughters, my wife specifically prayed that each of them would have a personal relationship with Jesus. She didn't pray that prayer with the miscarriages. Our two daughters are a specific answer to prayer. I told you this was going to be a happy lesson, and I meant it. Back to the story:
14. Verse 18: The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. ¹⁹"My head! My head!" he said to his father. His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. ²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.
- a) Time for another of my Middle East culture references: Crops were mostly harvested in the summer. My guess is that it was a hot day when this incident happened. The baby boy from the last set of verses is now a child, with the age not given. Most likely the boy had sunstroke and the father took the boy home to his mother. The sad part of this story is the boy then died.
- b) Here is where the faith comes in. She didn't lay the boy in her bed or the boy's bed, but the bed of Elisha upstairs. It's as if she was thinking, "Elisha promised my husband and me a son to carry on the family name." Maybe she knew the story of Elijah raising up a boy from the dead. Either way, she was thinking, "It's not over until God says it's over and maybe Elisha can raise him from the dead. I'll leave the boy here until he shows up."

15. Verse 22: She called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return."
- a) The interesting story fact here is that she didn't deliver the sad news to her husband that their son was dead. For those of you who like old western movies or as I visualize it, the old Lone Ranger television show, I picture the grieving mother now riding a donkey (as she didn't have a horse) as fast as she can to go find Elisha to see if he can do something. The point is she's willing to increase her faith here. Her boy is dead, and she won't give up that easily. She rides off to find Elisha.
 - b) So does this mean if a death tragedy strikes our house, we should go find a man of God to see if he could bring the dead back to life? Most likely no. Yes this boy will be healed, but he'll also die again one day. Jesus came to teach us how to have eternal life, not to cure us of whatever is the problem of the moment. With that said, can He and does He help us at times with our issues? Of course. However, my point is we can't count on or live for such miracles, just trust that ultimately God works things out for His glory. OK, I admit that I just gave a depressing thought and I promised to avoid that for this lesson. Let's get back to the happy aspect of this story.
16. Verse 23: "Why go to him today?" he asked. "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath." "It's all right," she said. ²⁴ She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on; don't slow down for me unless I tell you." ²⁵ So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.
- a) Here we have a small scene play out between this woman who the text says was "well to do" and an unnamed servant of hers. To paraphrase the servant, "Why go see Elisha? It's not a special religious day such as a Sabbath, the day Jewish people go to worship God or the "New Moon" (an ancient Jewish tradition to have a worship service on the night when there is no moon in the sky). So why are you bothering to travel this way?
 - i) I suspect the reason these verses are here is that this woman did not know where Elisha lived when he didn't stay with her. Therefore this unnamed servant lead the parade of two donkeys to lead her to Elisha.
 - b) The other interesting bit of trivia here is that Elisha lived at Mount Carmel. This is where the famous "battle between the gods" took place some time back where Elijah (not Elisha) challenged the worshippers of Baal to a contest to see who is the true God. (This is from 1st Kings Chapter 18.) Elisha is now living where God worked mightily in the past. This is speculation on my part, but I think Elisha wanted to be near God and here is where He worked in a major way not too long in the distant past.
 - c) Anyway it is about a 15-20 mile journey from where she lived to Mount Carmel. Donkeys can run up to 20 miles an hour, so it was probably about an hour's journey to get there.
17. Verse 25 (cont.): When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite!" ²⁶ Run to meet her and ask her, "Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?" "Everything is all right," she said.
- a) Speaking of servants, Elisha's own servant named Gehazi was the first to spot the woman and her servant riding on donkeys when they got to Mount Carmel. If you studied what happened at Mount Carmel back in 1st Kings 18, you may recall that this was the "home" of Baal worship. I don't know if such worship was still common at the time of Elisha, but I give the woman credit for her willingness to trust God, travel a long way to find Elisha to see if he could do something to bring the boy back to life. It shows what any mother is willing to do when her child's life is at stake.
 - b) When she gets to where she wants to go, she wanted to tell Elisha personally what was wrong so she lies to Elisha's servant and says, "Everything is all right". In her mind only Elisha himself could do something like Elijah did chapters earlier. I'm sure Gehazi could have prayed for her or offered to help. The point is she's on a mission and is not going to let anything stop her from her goal of bringing Elisha to the child. This is a case of God working on her faith just where she's at and not trying to fix her just yet.

18. Verse 27: When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why."
- a) For some reason I find it funny that when she finally reaches Elisha, the first thing that Elisha's servant Gehazi does is push her away. Yes Gehazi is Elisha's servant and yes he is trying to protect him at all costs. The mistake he makes is that Elisha's mission like our mission is to draw others closer to God, not keep others away from him.
 - b) I have to admit, this reminds me a little of when children wanted to see Jesus and His disciples tried to drive the children away from Jesus. Then Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, as theirs is the kingdom of God". (Matthew 19:14, etc.) Yes Jesus was trying to make the point that we must come to Him in full trust like a little child, but at the same time Jesus was teaching his disciples not to turn down anyone getting close to Him.
 - i) Now here was Elisha's servant trying to drive away this woman who rode as far as hard as she could to see Elisha and his servant tried to drive her away from him.
 - ii) Also give Elisha a little credit for realizing something was wrong and up to this moment in time, God had not revealed to Elisha what was the issue.
19. Verse 28: "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes?'"
²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face."
- a) Here is another little fascinating scene. Elisha found out about the dead boy. He knew that he promised she would have a son. He didn't say, "Oh too bad he died. Go back to your husband and have another baby. He also didn't say let me pray for you as you are obviously hurting right now. Instead he makes this strange request for his servant to go back with her and lay his staff on the boy and don't delay for anything.
 - b) To respond, first a few words about a "staff". Think of it as a walking stick. Moses used his staff to perform many miracles back in Egypt. One's walking stick is associated with a person. This was Elisha's way of saying "Take the power of God with you home and see if God will work through this staff to bring the boy back to life."
 - c) Yes I believe Elisha cared about this woman. He was trying to increase her faith in God. He was saying in effect, "Trust that God is going to do something. As a sign that He can and will work in your life, take my staff as it is associated with me. However, she is not at the point yet where she can just trust in God to work that way, so she will ask for Elisha to come himself to help in the next verse.
20. Verse 30: But the child's mother said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her. ³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened."
- a) Bottom line is she won't settle for Elisha's walking stick, she needed Elisha to be there by himself. She was convinced the only way for God to raise the boy from the dead is for Elisha to personally be there. I'm sure if God wanted to work a different way He could make it happen anyway He wants to. The point is God is working at the level of faith that the woman had at that moment. Her level of faith was Elisha needs to personally be there in order for a miracle to happen. Therefore, both God and Elisha were willing to work at that level. That's the lesson for us when God calls on us to be helpful to others.
 - b) We also get told in these verses that the servant Gehazi took off the moment Elisha told him to go lay Elisha's staff on the boy. Since her faith wouldn't accept that miracle, it was not going to happen that way.
 - c) Does this mean God can only do miracles however we believe He can? Of course not. It is just about increasing our faith and working at whatever level we're at any given time. I'm also proud of Elisha for realizing this and willing to travel with her back to the boy.

21. Verse 32: When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³ He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. ³⁵ Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.
- a) Now comes the happy ending to this little story. Elisha travels back with this woman, he finds the dead boy on his couch in his rooftop apartment. Elisha then stretches himself over the boy. To understand why he did this, we need to recall that the prophet Elijah was a mentor to Elisha. The prophet Elijah used a similar method to bring a man back to life in 1st Kings Chapter 17. That story of Elijah is the first time in the bible of anyone ever bringing someone back from the dead. Here in 2nd Kings Chapter 4, we have the second recorded such story. My point is both stories have similar methods. It is as if Elijah told Elisha exactly how he did it and Elisha is imitating that method, motion for motion.
 - b) Does that mean one has to use this exact method to raise someone from the dead? Don't know, as I've never tried it. I suspect many have tried for millenniums with no luck. God allowed these specific miracles to show that He and He alone has the power of life over death. The only other recorded miracles as such were by Jesus on a handful of occasions.
 - c) As I like to point out, everyone raised from the dead eventually died again. The point of this miracle is not that such people live forever on earth. It is that God has the power over life and death, period. I also know of a fairly famous bible teacher named Walter Martin (had his own radio show for many years, died a few decades ago), did say that when he was a young missionary one time, also raised someone from the dead. Whenever Water would encounter an "extreme Pentecostal" who insisted one had to have every spiritual gift in order to be saved, Walter would ask, have you ever raised a person from the dead in order to show them that having every spiritual gift is not a Christian requirement.
 - d) In summary, God will do, what God will do. We can always ask him to bring someone back to life, but we can't count on God working that way. God choose to work this way in order to increase the faith of this one woman.
 - e) Before I move on, I also want to say that I'm strangely fascinated by the phrase "sneezed seven times" before the boy came back to life. I'm sure there are bible commentaries full of speculations why that is stated in the bible. The truth is, we don't know why it is there. My guess is it is simply a visual sign to show that God restored the life of the boy. I'll just add that to my list of fairly trivial questions to ask God one day.
 - f) The summary here is that Elisha violated the biblical law of touching a dead body, laid his body over the boy's body and God allowed that method to work in order to bring this boy back to life. Again if it was God's will, maybe a simple prayer would have worked. The reason Elisha choose this method is that is how he remembered Elijah telling him how he did it many chapters earlier in "Kings". Anyway, it worked, and everyone is fine.
22. Verse 36: Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." ³⁷ She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.
- a) Another fascinating bit of trivia here to me, is the fact that the boy's mom was not in the room with them. If that was my son, I would want to be there to see what Elisha would do. Maybe he insisted to be there by himself. Still, she wasn't even standing outside the door to peak in. Elisha had to call for his servant who was nearby to go call for the mom to tell her that her son was alive. Maybe the mother was downstairs grieving or praying for Elisha to be successful. Either way, her faith in God increased because she was willing to take the steps to go find Elisha in the first place and bring him back to this place. The main point of the story is not so much the boy coming back to life as it showing that if we are willing to trust in God anything is possible with Him, even life from the dead.

23. Verse 38: Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these men."
- a) It's now time for the next miracle in this chapter. Elisha didn't go back to Mount Carmel but to the place where the prophets lived. Think of it as Elisha returning to the campus of the "bible college" of future prophets. That's roughly what is happening here. Anyway at that place, there was a famine in the region. When Elisha gets there, he said to his servant to make a big pot of stew for everyone to eat. I don't think Elisha had any ingredients on him, but I suspect this is just Elisha trying to increase the faith of those there. That's why we read in the next verse of Elisha telling the bible prophets to go gather up edible things that can be put in the pot.
24. Verse 39: One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine. He gathered some of its gourds and filled the fold of his cloak. When he returned, he cut them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were. ⁴⁰The stew was poured out for the men, but as they began to eat it, they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" And they could not eat it.
- a) The short version here is that people went out gathered vegetables and herbs. Someone put something in the pot that was poisonous. One of the commentaries I read said what was put in there is only poisonous in large doses. The point is someone there realized the stew was bad and they told Elisha.
 - b) Remember that the point of this section is about increasing people's faith in God. Elisha told them to make some stew. Now Elisha is in effect going to ask God to cure this stew because there is a famine and food is hard to find.
 - i) Notice Elisha didn't pray for the famine to end.
 - ii) Notice Elisha didn't say, start the stew over again and do it right this time!
 - iii) My point is Elisha worked with the faith and situation at hand in order to increase the faith of the people working at this "bible college". In that sense, this story is a lot like the woman told to go collect empty jars to pour out the oil. This is another example of God saying to us, "Let me work with what you have, and I'll multiply that not only to prove my power, but so that I can work through us so that we can make a difference for God in this world.
 - iv) In a sense, this is a lot like Jesus multiplying the loaves of bread to feed the 5,000. However, I'm getting to that comparison coming up in a few verses.
 - v) In the meantime, it's time to get back to the bad pot of stew.
25. Verse 41: Elisha said, "Get some flour." He put it into the pot and said, "Serve it to the people to eat." And there was nothing harmful in the pot.
- a) The flour that Elisha put in the pot is "strained" grain. First let me state, that there is no aspect to flour that offsets the poison. It's not like the flour is the antidote to that poison.
 - b) To explain why Elisha did this, consider what Elisha did not say or do: He didn't say, I said make some stew, and if God wants to bless it, He will. He didn't say, eat up boys, if we get sick, we'll just trust in God to get better. Nor did Elisha just bless this stew and then take a big bite. Instead we get this strange little story about adding flour to it.
 - c) To understand, in effect one has to go back to Leviticus. One of the types of offerings to God involved giving grain. This was a type of sacrifice shared with the priests. It was a way of saying, I am grateful for God blessing my life and I want to share some of that blessing with God, so that food was shared with the priests to show one's gratitude.
 - i) My point by Elisha putting grain (flour) in the pot, he is saying, "I give this pot of stew to God. It's now His problem whether or not to accept it". My guess is that Elisha then took the first bite. Remember that this was a prophet "bible college" so hopefully the other prophets would understand the biblical significance of adding that grain to the mixture. The point is they trusted God here and they're willing to eat that stew based on Elisha's word that it was good.

- d) So does this mean if we have some say, bad milk, we should put some flour in there and it will be good again? Most likely, we'll just have sour milk that now tastes like flour. Like I said earlier, God can work anyway He wants when He wants. It's not about repeating the exact steps to cure say, our bad milk. The point is about trusting God to work through our lives to increase our own faith in our trust in Him.
- e) In the meantime, we still have one more miracle to go in this chapter.
26. Verse 42: A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said.
- a) Before I say anything else here, don't picture a big loaf of bread that one buys at a market. It's more like pita bread. These are small loaves with no leaven so they're not very big.
- b) In the last set of verses, there was a famine. We don't know if this was "some time later" or just famine relief by bread being brought on the scene. Either way, we have a group of people who now have bread to eat.
27. Verse 43: "How can I set this before a hundred men?" his servant asked. But Elisha answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: `They will eat and have some left over.' " ⁴⁴ Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.
- a) The bottom line here is that there was not enough bread for everyone to be full. Once again Elisha worked to increase everyone's faith by somehow setting the bread before all of these people and my guess is everyone walked away full.
- b) I don't know if Elisha multiplied the loaves the way Jesus did, but I suspect something similar did happen here. If you don't know, the story of Jesus multiplying the loaves of bread to feed 5,000 men is the only miracle told in all four Gospel accounts. Like I said in my introduction, the Old Testament never says the Messiah will do "x and y" and here is when the Messiah actually did "x and y" in the New Testament. It is more about patterns. One of those patterns is the miracles performed. Just as Elisha somehow multiplied bread for many to eat, so Jesus did the same.
- c) This brings up a logical question: If everything Jesus did was made up based on stories from the Old Testament, how do we know that well Jesus wasn't a made up character?
- i) One proof is that we still records of a Jewish historian named Josephus who lived at that time who wrote briefly about Jesus. Even the official Jewish commentary written at that time made a reference to Jesus as the illegitimate son of Mary. My point is that religious Jewish scholars acknowledged Jesus lived and was a great teacher, but deny Him as the Son of God. We also have records of people who studied under the apostles. Those apostles swore on their deathbed at the point of being tortured that the stories are true. My point is there is external evidence that shows the legitimacy of Jesus as really coming on the scene.
28. OK John, this was an upbeat chapter with a bunch of cute stories about miracles that occurred a very long time ago. We don't get those same miracles in our lives. Tell me why I should care? The issue for us Christians is not so much to be the people receiving the miracles, but to be like Elisha. That is, to help people draw closer to God. So are you saying we have the power to do the miracles like Elisha did?
- a) Consider that Jesus told His disciples, that they (us) will do greater works than Jesus did. (From John 14:12.) I admit, I have always been fascinated by that claim. Does that mean we as disciples of Jesus can do greater things than when He feed the 5,000 or cured a man of leprosy or even raised someone from the dead? I know you said that someone named Walter Martin did raise someone from the dead, but I've never done anything like that.
- b) With that said, consider the following: Every time someone gets saved, in effect they have just taken the death sentence off of their head and brought them back to eternal life. That is why anytime we lead someone closer to God, we too have brought someone to life.

- c) My point is that we as Christians have the privilege of leading others closer to Him. We have the privilege and the power not to say feed 5,000 with a few loaves of bread, but to share the good news of Jesus with those who are dying but don't realize it. We can take steps to draw people closer to God by having them and us trust Him in tough situations.
 - d) If we see someone suffering, we too can say, OK, what do you have on hand? Ask God to bless that asset so it can be used for His glory. If someone wants a child or a spouse, take the steps to prepare for that event. For example, I knew of a girl who complained she was never going to get married. She let go of the desire and was going to do missionary work. Then of course, God brought a great man in her life. If you want children, go volunteer to work somewhere with children and watch God bless you accordingly. I'm just giving a few examples here to show how we can increase our faith to trust that God can and will work in our lives if we are willing. Of course there are exceptions, but the point is about letting go of our desires and asking Him what is His will for our lives and go where we believe He wants us to go.
 - e) To finish the comparison of these miracles to our lives, if we have sour milk, please throw it out or ask God to either "bless it or block it" referring to whatever poison we may have to face in our lives. As far as multiplying the bread, think of it as asking God to use what we have on hand and let him deal with the difference. That's what Elisha did with the oil and that's what He did with the bread.
29. With all of that said, let me come back to the opening statement about increasing our faith. Like I said to start this lesson, it is wonderful to read about and even fun to teach it. It is hard to go out and actually increase our own faith in God. A good starting point is to ask God something like, "Heavenly Father, my time and my life belongs to You. Help me to increase my faith in You and take steps to trust You more with My life." My guess is God can't resist a prayer like that because we are putting our life in His hands and not ours. With that said, I'll leave that one line request as my closing prayer for this lesson: That God increase all of our faith(s) in Him and help us to let go of our fears and trust that He can and will work in our lives in a mighty way today. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.
30. Until next time, thanks for reading and let us all let God increase our faith in Him.