

Week 19, Lecture 53.¹ Elisha's Ministry Begins, 2 Kings 2:13-25

Elisha's First Miracle, vv. 13-15

And he took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.¹⁴ Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other; and Elisha went over.¹⁵ Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him over against them, they said, "The **spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.**" And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him.

Elisha, like Elijah, is in the tradition of Moses.

Once Rabbi Kline and I taught a course entitled "Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus: the Miracle-Working Prophets"

The Fruitless Search for Elijah, vv. 15-18

And they said to him, "Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men; pray, let them go, and seek your master; it may be that the Spirit of the LORD has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send."¹⁷ But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, "Send." They sent therefore fifty men; and for three days they sought him but did not find him.¹⁸ And they came back to him, while he tarried at Jericho, and he said to them, "Did I not say to you, Do not go?"

Elijah has truly been taken up to heaven

Elisha & the sterile water, vv. 19-22

Now the men of the city said to Elisha, "Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful."²⁰ He said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him.²¹ Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it, and said, "Thus says the LORD, I have made this water wholesome; henceforth neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it."²² So the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word which Elisha spoke.

Moses tradition of providing water for the people. Recall the story of Moses providing water from the rock.

In the old blessing for holy water, salt was used.

Elisha & the disrespectful children, vv. 23-25

He went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!"²⁴ And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys.²⁵ From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and thence he returned to Samaria.

Remarks of Garrison Keillor

He says that when he was a boy they used to teach this story in Lutheran Sunday School.

Nowadays the don't teach it any more. There is not nearly as much respect for elders as there used to be.

Week 19, Lecture 54. Elisha Multiplies Food, 2 Kings 4:1-7, 42-44

First Miracle: Multiplication of Oil

The Situation, 4:1

Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves."²

The man who died was one of the "sons of the prophets" (NABRE one of the "guild prophets")

The lot of widows and orphans was harsh.

Because her husband was one of the "sons of the prophets," the widow is hoping Elisha will help

¹ Lectures are numbered consecutively. Although this is this week's first lecture, its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

² All quotes are from the RSV, unless specified otherwise.

Intervention the Miracle-Worker, vv. 2-4

And Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil." ³ Then he said, "Go outside, borrow vessels of all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. ⁴ Then go in, and shut the door upon yourself and your sons, and pour into all these vessels; and when one is full, set it aside."

The directions here remind me a little bit of the story of Jesus at Cana.

Multiple vessels are being filled. In John 2 it is 6 large jars (ca. 150 gallons become wine). Here it is many small vessels.

The Miracle, vv. 5-7

⁵ So she went from him and shut the door upon herself and her sons; and as she poured they brought the vessels to her.

⁶ When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another."

Then the oil stopped flowing. ⁷ She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest."

Unlike the miracle of Elijah for the widow of Zarephath, the point here is not the food produced -- to prevent starvation

Rather it is the economic value of the oil, which enables the widow to keep her children, and have a decent life.

Second Miracle: Multiplication of Loaves

In the NT, the story of the multiplication of the loaves is the most widely attested miracle of Jesus. There are 6 narratives;

Jesus feeds 5,000: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; Jesus feeds 4,000: Matthew & Mark.

Most scholars think these are different versions of one event, passed down variously in oral tradition. Back to the OT

The Situation, 4:42

A man came from Baalshalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, **twenty loaves of barley**, and fresh ears of grain in his sack.

Twenty Loaves + additional food

In the NT there will be only 5 loaves & additional fish. The lesser amount of food stresses the superiority of Jesus.

Barley. In the NT, only John mentions that the bread Jesus used was **barley**.

Is John intentionally drawing attention to the parallel with Elisha?

It is also possible that barley (the bread of the poor) was used for Eucharist in John's community.

If so, it is interesting that such a Eucharist would not be considered "valid" in today's Church.

"Consecration" of anything besides wheat is not only against the law in current teaching (illicit)

Bread other than wheat bread does not result in the presence of Jesus (invalid)

Perhaps the current teaching needs to be rethought. Back to the OT

Command, Objection, Command Repeated & Expanded

And Elisha said, "Give to the men, that they may eat." ⁴³ But his servant said, "How am I to set this before a **hundred** men?" So he repeated, "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'"

Structure: A similar structure occurs in the NT accounts. E.g., **Mark 6:37-39**

Mark 6:37-39 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down by companies upon the green grass.

Number Fed

In the NT accounts, the number of people is either 4,000 or 5,000. The greater number stresses the superiority of Jesus.

Matthew makes this even greater, insisting that the 5,000 does not include "women & children"

The NT shows Jesus in the tradition of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha -- but greater than they were.

The Miracle, v. 44

So he set it before them. And they ate, and had some left, according to the **word of the LORD**.

The focus of the OT story is on the power of the Word of the LORD through the prophet.

The NT Emphasis varies from Gospel to Gospel

John 6:14 When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed **the prophet** who is to come into the world!" (RSV)

The people see Jesus in the tradition of Moses, Elijah, Elisha.

For John, of course, this Christology is not deep enough; it is only a **starting point** for reflection of Jesus.

Week 19, Lecture 55. Elisha Raises the Dead, 2 Kgs 4:8-37

Context. A wealthy woman in Shunem prevails on her husband to provide a guest room for the "man of God."

When Elisha asks how he can thank her, his servant Gehazi notes that she & her aged husband are childless.

Elisha's Response, 2 Kgs 4:15-17

He said, "Call her." And when he had called her, she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶ And he said, "At this season, when the time comes round, you shall embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God; do not lie to your maidservant." ¹⁷ But the woman conceived, and she bore a son about that time the following spring, as Elisha had said to her.

In the Bible LORD, Lord, and lord represent **three different Hebrew words**.

The Child's Death, vv. 18-23

When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. ¹⁹ And he said to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰ And when he had lifted him, and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died. ²¹ And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. ²² Then she called to her husband, and said, "Send me one of the servants and one of the asses, that I may quickly go to the man of God, and come back again." ²³ And he said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." She said, "**It will be well.**" ²⁴ Then she saddled the ass, and she said to her servant, "Urge the beast on; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you."

Comment. I think the RSV misses the point. The woman says "Shalom."

This can mean "[it will be] well/peace. But it is also a way of saying "hello" and "good-bye."

Basically she says: "I'm outta here! This discussion is over!"

The encounter with Elisha, vv. 25-29

Gehazi meets her as she approaches. She assures him everything is okay with her and her son.

²⁷ And when she came to the mountain to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came to thrust her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me." ²⁸ Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?"

Like a good Jew, the woman **complains with questions**. Recall the Exodus story.

and they said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt?" (Exod 14:11)

Elisha's Response, vv. 29-31

²⁹ He said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet any one, **do not salute him**; and if any one salutes you, do not reply; and lay my staff upon the face of the child." ³⁰ Then the mother of the child said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So he arose and followed her. ³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff upon the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. Therefore he returned to meet him, and told him, "The child has not awaked."

The command not to greet anyone. Compare the command of Jesus to disciples he sends on an urgent mission

Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and **greet no one** along the way. (Luke 10:4, NAB)

Gehazi's failure. A NT parallel would be the failure of the disciples to cast out a demon.

Interestingly, in this story, some people think the boy is **dead**.

Mark 9:26-28. And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, "**He is dead.**" ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and **he arose.** ²⁸ And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "**Why could we not cast it out?**"

The Miracle, vv. 33-37

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. ³³ So he went in and shut the door upon the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he went up and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. ³⁵ Then he got up again, and walked once to and fro in the house, and went up, and stretched himself upon him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. ³⁶ Then he summoned Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." So he called her. And when she came to him, he said, "Take up your son." ³⁷ She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took up her son and went out.

Reflections. There are similarities to the story of Elijah raising the son of the widow of Zarephath.

The NT stories of Jesus lack many of these details.

He gives a command (all 3 stories); Sometimes accompanied by a gesture, such as taking by the hand (Jairus' daughter)

Week 19, Lecture 56. Elisha Cures the "Leper" Naaman, 2 Kgs 5:1-27

"Leper." Naaman is a "leper." This is not Hansen's disease, which did not exist in Israel at this time.

The term *šār'at* described a number of skin diseases

Hansen's disease was brought to the middle east by the troops of Alexander the Great a little before 300 B.C.

In the NT we cannot be sure if the "lepers" cured by Jesus had Hansen's disease, or one of these OT illnesses

Context, 2 Kings 5:1-9. Naaman is the general of the Syrian Army. He has captured an Israelite slave girl on a raid. Because he is a kind master, she suggests that he go to the "man of God" to be cured.

Eventually he receives the required permissions from his king and the king of Israel. He arrives at Elisha's house.

The Word of the Prophet, v. 10

And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

Naaman's Response, vv. 11-14

But Naaman was angry, and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. ¹³ But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Naaman's Gratitude, v. 15

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, I know that **there is no God in all the earth but in Israel**; so accept now a present from your servant."

Naaman is not a "monotheist." He means there's no god as helpful & saving as the God of Israel.

Naaman's First Request, vv. 16-17

But he said, "As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. ¹⁷ Then Naaman said, "If not, I pray you, let there be given to your servant two mules' burden of earth; for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD.

The Rationale. Naaman thinks that the power of YHWH is limited to "Israelite turf."

Therefore he wants to take some of this "turf" to build a shrine. Think of how we regard foreign embassies.

Naaman's Second Request, vv. 18-19a

In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter." ¹⁹ He said to him, "Go in peace."

Elisha's Response is pastoral

He could have insisted that the LORD is a "jealous God." He understands that Naaman is doing "the best that he can."

I think this pastoral attitude is manifested in some of the statements of Pope Francis

his attitude toward those alienated from the Church because of marriage difficulties

his attitude toward those alienated from the Church because of their sexual orientation

I think this "pastoral attitude" of Elisha shows that the pope's teaching is not without biblical foundation.

Gehazi's Lie & Naaman's response, vv. 22-24

Gehazi thinks Elisha should have taken some gift from Naaman.

He decides to take advantage of his situation. He follows after Naaman and catches up to him.

He tells Naaman his master has some unexpected guests

... My master has sent me to say, 'There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; pray, give them a talent of silver and two festal garments.'" ²³ And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two festal garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they carried them before Gehazi. ²⁴ And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and put them in the house; and he sent the men away, and they departed.

Elisha Confronts Gehazi, vv. 25-27

He went in, and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere." ²⁶ But he said to him, "Did I not go with you in spirit when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, menservants and maidservants? ²⁷ Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you, and to your descendants for ever." So he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow.

A "Punishing" Miracle. There are many of these in the OT. The most famous are the plagues of Egypt. We have seen the story of Elijah and the three captains, where fire comes down from heaven to destroy the disrespectful. My personal favorite is the story of Elisha and the disrespect boys (cursed by the prophet & killed by a she bear). The early Church also like these kind of miracle stories

Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5) Extra-biblical stories of the punishment of Simon Magus

The Jesus Tradition

John Meier has made an exhaustive study of the miracles of Jesus.³

He notes that no such miracles are ascribed to Jesus in his dealings with **people**.

The closest analogy is the Cursing of the Fig Tree.

Meier regards this miracle as not historical. Rather it is a story created by the early Church to teach a symbolic truth.

Week 19, Lecture 57. Two Final Stories about Elisha, 2 Kings 8 & 13

Two Stories

The first is another example of prophetic involvement in politics, 2 Kgs 8:7-15.

The second is the final miracle of Elisha, 2 Kgs 13:20-21

Sickness of Benhadad, 2 Kings 8:7-8

Now Elisha came to Damascus. Benhadad the king of Syria was sick; and when it was told him, "The man of God has come here," ⁸ the king said to Hazeal, "Take a present with you and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD through him, saying, 'Shall I recover from this sickness?'"

³ This is found in the final 500 pages of volume 2 of his 5-volume series [*A Marginal Jew, Rethinking the Historical Jesus*](#).

Mission of Hazael, v. 9

⁹ So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, all kinds of goods of Damascus, forty camel loads. When he came and stood before him, he said, "Your son Benhadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, 'Shall I recover from this sickness?'"

Elisha's Response, vv. 10-12

And Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You shall certainly recover'; but the LORD has shown me that he shall certainly die." ¹¹ And he fixed his gaze and stared at him, until he was ashamed. And the man of God wept. ¹² And Hazael said, "Why does my lord weep?" He answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel; you will set on fire their fortresses, and you will slay their young men with the sword, and dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their women with child."

Puzzlement & More Prophecy, v. 13

And Hazael said, "What is your servant, who is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?" Elisha answered, "The LORD has shown me that you are to be king over Syria."

Hazael "Takes the Hint", vv. 14-15

Then he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?" And he answered, "He told me that you would certainly recover." ¹⁵ But on the morrow he took the coverlet and dipped it in water and spread it over his face, till he died. And Hazael became king in his stead.

Here Elisha has intervened in foreign politics.

This intervention will have results in the Northern Kingdom, Israel.

Elisha's Final Miracle, 2 Kings 13:20-21

So Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. ²¹ And as a man was being buried, lo, a marauding band was seen and the man was cast into the grave of Elisha; and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood on his feet.

This miracle is post-mortem!

We are not told how the man reacted when he found himself alive in Elisha's tomb.

Biblical Resuscitation Stories

The OT contains 3 such stories

- 1) Elijah raises the son of the widow of Zarephath
- 2) Elisha raises the son of the Shunammite Woman
- 3) Elisha's bones give life to a hastily buried man.

The NT contains 3 such stories

- 1) the daughter of Jairus (Matthew, Mark & Luke)
- 2) the son of the widow of Nain (Luke only)
- 3) Lazarus of Bethany (John only)

The Resurrection of Jesus -- Firstborn of the Dead

In spite of these 6 biblical stories (and any extra-biblical stories)

the NT can refer to Jesus as "the firstborn of/ from the dead"

Col 1:18 ... He is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead**, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. (NAB)

Rev. 1:4-5 John, to the seven churches in Asia:² grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, . . . ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, **the firstborn of the dead** and ruler of the kings of the earth. . . . (NAB)

The Resurrection of Jesus is a **unique** event. He does not come back to this life.

He is transformed to a new and glorious mode of existence.