

Research: II Kings 4:8–12, 14–17
Elisha and the Shunammite woman

8 And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

“*Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman* — Great for estate, or birth and quality. *And she constrained him to eat bread* — Pressed him with great importunity, and at length, with great difficulty, prevailed with him to dine with her. *As oft as he passed by he turned in thither* — She made him so welcome, that he did not scruple, when he had occasion to go that way, to step in there and refresh himself; which she probably invited him to do” (Benson Commentary).

“As the Shunammite woman had a husband still alive, it would be more natural to speak of him as ‘great’ in the sense of ‘rich’, and perhaps here the meaning is rather ‘influential’. She was clearly a person of independent character, and *one who* could act when the occasion demanded it.

she constrained him to eat bread] The journeys of Elisha to and fro had somehow become known to her and she offered him hospitality. This was the usual way in the East, where houses for public entertainment were uncommon.

as oft as he passed by] Apparently the allusion is to such rounds as the chief of the prophetic colleges would make to the different centres at which they were gathered. That Elisha’s visits were frequent is clear from the next verse” (Cambridge Bible).

Passing by: the same word that is used several times in the Old and New Testaments. (Strong’s 2633, 5674)

To pass over; cross over; through; to forgive; a passing over of guilt

9 And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.

“*She said to her husband* — In frequent conversation with him. *This is a holy man of God* — A prophet, and that of eminent holiness; by our kindness to whom we shall procure a blessing to ourselves. *Which passeth by us continually* — For Shunem was in his way as he went from Carmel, which was not far from hence, to Beth-el and Jericho, and other places of the sons of the prophets” (Benson Commentary).

10 Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

“*Let us make him a little chamber — on the wall* — A private room, remote from the house, where he may retire, and be free from the noise of family business; and enjoy that privacy, which, I perceive, he desires for his prayers and meditations. *Let us set for him there a bed and a table, &c.* — He will not be troublesome or chargeable to us: he cares not for rich furniture or costly entertainment, but is content with bare necessaries. *And — he shall turn in thither* — Take up his lodging there, if he think good” (Benson Commentary).

11 And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.

“And it fell on a day - The original of the expression here used, which occurs three times in the present narrative” (Barnes’ Notes).

12 And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

“*And he said to Gehazi his servant.* Gehazi is here mentioned for the first time. He seems to have been Elisha's "servant" in a lower sense than Elisha had been Elijah's. Still, his position was such that on one occasion ([2 Kings 8:4, 5](#)) a king of Israel did not disdain to hold a conversation with him. *Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him;* i.e. before Gehazi. Elisha communicates with the woman through his servant, or at any rate in his presence, probably to prevent any suspicion of impropriety arising in the mind of any one. The prophet of the Lord must not be evil spoken of” (Pulpit Commentary).

14 And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.

“what is to be done for thee?—Wishing to testify his gratitude for the hospitable attentions of this family, he announced to her the birth of a son "about this time next year." The interest and importance of such an intelligence can only be estimated by considering that Oriental women, and Jewish in particular, connect ideas of disgrace with barrenness, and cherish a more ardent desire for children than women in any other part of the world (Ge 18:10-15)” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

15 And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.

“**Call her.**—The Shunammite is now summoned into the presence of the prophet himself.

She stood.—Or, *took her stand*. Modesty, or reverence for Elisha, prevented her from going farther” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“**And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door;** rather, **the doorway**. The same word in Hebrew stands both for "doorway" and for "door." It would seem that the woman came at once on being called, but, out of modesty and respect, would not advance beyond the entrance of the apartment” (Pulpit Commentary).

16 And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

“*About this season, according to the time of life* — About this time next year; see on [Genesis 18:10](#); *thou shalt embrace a son* — She had received this prophet *in the name of a prophet*, and now she receives, not a courtier’s reward, in being spoken for to the king, but a prophet’s reward, a signal mercy, given in answer to a prophet’s prayer. *Nay, my lord, do not lie unto thy handmaid* — Do not delude me with vain hopes. She could not believe it for joy. *The woman — bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her* — The event, within the time limited, confirmed the truth of the promise” (Benson Commentary).

17 And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

“The event was exactly as predicted; the child was born at the same season of the ensuing year” (Pulpit Commentary).