**Research on: Elisha and the Widow at Shunem**

II Kings 4:8-12, 16-21, 25, 27, 30, 32, 33, 35-37

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.

“*Constrained*. Prevail, be strong, constrain, urge” (*TWOT* 636).

“We infer that at this time Elisha had been frequently passing between Samaria and what was probably his ordinary place of abode on Mt. Carmel. The direct road from the one to the other place does not lead by Shunem, which lies somewhat farther to the east. . . but it so happened that on a certain occasion Elisha ‘passed over to Shunem.’ We infer that Elisha was at first unwilling to accept the invitation to the ‘great’ house. Probably there were few such in the land where the prophet could have felt himself at home. But when he yielded to the urgent yet modest importunity of the Shunammite, he must soon have perceived that this was not only a pleasant place of rest on the journey, but one to which he might safely resort for refreshment of body and mind” (Edersheim 765).

“In the King James Version of the Bible the Shunammite woman is called great (II Kings 4:8). This undoubtedly means that she was a wealthy and influential woman but her story shows that she was great in other ways also—in her faith, her wisdom, and her silence. Living as she did at Shunem, a village on the edge of the rich grain fields of Esdraelon, she has come to be known as the Shunammite” (Deen 135).

“The whole episode of Elisha and the Shunammite woman shows that she was big-hearted, generous, quick to discern a prophet, who might happen along. She makes a 30-mile round trip, which might have taken two days to walk, to seek Elisha’s help for her son The word "great," then, may apply to the particular insight which she exhibited as well as to her possible wealth or influence. One meaning of the adjective is "great in importance" (TWOT). RSV understands it to mean "wealthy," and JFB extends this to include "opulence."

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

*Perceive* is *yada* in Hebrew and means “know, know the difference between good and evil, discriminate, distinguish” (Gesenius 3045).

*Holy* is *qadowsh* in Hebrew and means “holy, sanctified, sacred, hallowed. The noun *qodesh* connotes the concept of ‘holiness,’ i.e. the essential nature of that which belongs to the sphere of the sacred and which is thus distinct from the common or profane” (*TWOT* 1990b).

“*Holy* (*qadowsh*) Sacred, holy, separate, apart, separate from human infirmity, impurity, and sin” (*B-D-B* 6918).

“It is quite evident that she was a woman of property, a leader in her community, one who reached out hands to bestow kindness upon rich and poor alike. Little is said of her husband. We do know that he was old (II Kings 4:14), probably much older than she was. From the story, however, we later can see that he had confidence in his wife’s judgment and bestowed upon her all the good things of life” (Deen 136).

“Yet this may here be pointed out, that the manner in which the Shunammite marked Elisha as a ‘holy’ man of God, indicates enlightened piety; the care with which she received him, affectionate regard; the provision which she made for his absolute privacy, unselfishness and reverence; and the circumstance of her attendance on Elisha’s religious instruction (v. 23), a certain spiritual relationship between them. And so it came that, after this first visit, ‘as oft’ as Elisha ‘passed across’ the plain of Esdraelon, ‘he turned aside’ [and this also literally, since Shunem was not in the direct road] to enjoy the hospitality of the pious mistress of the ‘great’ house at Shunem” (Edersheim 766).

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.

*Chamber* is *aliyah* in Hebrew and means “something lofty, i.e. a stair-way; also a second-story room or roof; figuratively, the sky, ascent, going up” (Gesenius 5944).

*Stool* is *kicce* in Hebrew and means “seat of honor, throne, seat, stool, royal dignity, authority, power” (Gesenius 3678)

*Candlestick* is *mnowrah* in Hebrew and means “lampstand. The Lord directed Moses to put a lampstand holding seven lamps in the Holy Place. These seven lamps represent God’s perfect leadership over his people. These ‘lights’ were to burn always being trimmed morning and evening. The lamp is a symbol of God’s personal leading” (Gesenius 4501).

“But the frequency of his visits, so far from inducing familiarity, only led to increased reverence on the part of the Shunammite. . . All this she urged on her husband as she proposed to make provision not only for his more proper entertainment, but for his complete privacy. In Palestine an outside stair led up from the road to the roof of the house, so that it was not necessary to pass through the interior of a dwelling. Part of the roof of the house she would now surround with walls, so making an ‘upper chamber’ of it. This would give to the prophet at all times undisturbed, and, if he wished it, unobserved access to, and egress from, his lodging. This was indeed thoughtful, unselfish, and withal, respectful kindness and hospitality. . . Evidently the object was to provide for a prolonged stay on the part of the prophet, and for his complete privacy, and as appears from the context (5:13), it included not only the prophet, but also his servant” (Edershiem 766).

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

“The upper room that the Shunammite prepared for Elisha was reached by an outer stairway from the garden. Cool, quiet, and private, it became a favorite retreat for the prophet when he visited neighboring towns. . . A man who breathed a spirit of soothing healing beneficence wherever he walked, Elisha often came to Shunem. He was a man who enjoyed the comforts of a home and who liked people. This family, in turn, was blessed to have as their guest the prophet, who was known for his work all over the northern kingdom” (Deen 137).

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

“We note that the initial kindness of the woman and her husband was in no expectation of any reward but was the spontaneous expression of hospitable hearts. It was not she who asked anything in return from Elisha. It was he who inquired of his servant Gehazi what he could do for her” (*IB* 3.205).

***“She stood before him (II Kings 4:12)***

*The International Critical Commentary* suggests that this means formally: the woman presented herself. It need not mean that she actually came into the room, since at this point Elisha communicated with her through his servant. “The intermediate agency of Gehazi, standing outside, was good manners, for a lady might not easily speak to a man in his chamber.”

16 And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son.

“*according to the time of life*. ‘When the time cometh round,’ i.e. in the spring of the following year” (Dummelow 231).

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

“Under divine direction Elisha acted at Gehazi’s suggestion and informed the Shunammite woman that in the next year she would give birth to a son. So it came to pass at the appointed time the child was born and in time grew into a young lad” (*EBC* 4. 185).

“Can we not imagine the mother’s strong affection for the son who came through the blessing of the great prophet? And would it not be natural to suppose that such an unexpected blessing increased her adoration for God” (Deen 137).

18 And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.

“The reference to "the reapers” is very true to life, for Shunem stood on the edge of the great plain of Esdraelon or Jezreel, which is still the chief grain-bearing district of Palestine.”

“And when the child was grown. . . Perhaps was six or seven years of age, or more:

“it fell on a day that he went out to his father to the reapers; it was harvest time, and the men were reaping the corn in the fields; and his father, though a wealthy man, was with them to direct them, and see they did their business well; and the child went out from the house to the field, to see his father and the reapers, for his recreation and diversion” (Gill’s Exposition of the Bible, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

19 And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.

“*My head, my head*. The description points to an attack of sunstroke, where the first symptom is pain in the head. But the father thinks lightly of it, for such attacks are more frequent with older persons than with children. He merely tells a servant to carry the child home. Sunstroke is alluded to in [Psalm 121:6](http://biblehub.com/psalms/121-6.htm), and it was from it that Manasses the husband of Judith died, in the barley harvest ([Jdt 8:2-3](http://apocrypha.org/judith/8-2.htm)).  
  
*to a lad*. **to his servant**. The Hebrew has a definite noun ‘to the servant’, i.e. who was at hand to carry out any order the master might give” (Cambridge Bible, www.biblehub.com).

20 And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died.

“And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon. It was in the morning, therefore, that the child received his sunstroke - an unusual, but not an [unknown](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/4-20.htm), occurrence. In the East the sun often becomes intensely hot by ten o'clock. And then died. There is no ambiguity here, no room for doubt; the child not only became insensible, but **died**. The historian could not possibly have expressed himself more plainly” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

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.

“Her thoughts at once go to Elisha and she puts the dead boy into the prophet’s chamber, perhaps with the thought that she will bring Elisha back with her, and then he will find the child at once. Or it may be that she felt there would be less fear of intruders there. This latter reason is supported by her further action of shutting the door. What hopes she may have had we can only conjecture, but she acts as though she believed that help was not impossible. ‘The good Shunammite hath lost her son, her faith she hath not lost’” (Cambridge Bible, www.biblehub.com).

“**Shut the door upon him;**partly in hopes that this might contribute something to the child’s restitution to life, she having in all probability had an account of the like miracle done by Elijah, [1 Kings 17:21](http://biblehub.com/1_kings/17-21.htm); and partly that she might for the present conceal the death of the child; which if it had been known, would have filled her husband with grief, and hindered her journey, and opened the mouths of the enemies of God and his prophets to blaspheme; whereas she had a confidence put into her by God, that the prophet could and would restore her son” (Matthew Poole’s Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

25 So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, *yonder is* that Shunammite:

“The distance was about sixteen or seventeen miles” (Barnes’ Notes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“*to mount Carmel*] The distance would occupy five or six hours riding. The LXX. inserts at the beginning of this verse a further direction to the servant. ‘Come, set forth and go to the man of God to Mount Carmel’.

“Probably from previous visits both the Shunammite and her servant were familiar with the road; for the whole narrative gives the impression that on Carmel there was a center of prophetic teaching and religious worship, and that the family from Shunem were among the frequenters thereof. Elisha discerns her coming in the distance and is able to say to Gehazi who she is some time before she arrives” (Cambridge Bible,

26 Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, *Is it* well with thee? *is it* well with thy husband? *is it* well with the child? And she answered, *It is* well.

“**Run now, I pray thee, to meet her.**—This perhaps indicates the respect in which Elisha held the Shunammitess. But it may denote surprise and apprehension at an *unusual* visit. Hence the inquiries about each member of the family.

**It is well.**—She said this merely to avoid further explanation. She would open her [grief](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3Dd1BjRTJHVXR6R2VQVkRkVDJXN1BkVkdKaHJZNWJrb0VyMHd1UEZEYkkxaStsc3RwRDRNUVRseFpLb1QrdU15clpwVWZxK2VFZ0pSMnhzaXBLRldHTjVPYUN5T3dFWWhlRkNaWkpJM3pBQURVRzBHK0FjVHkvOUorRGM0bGtKbVdaWTFVNjlraTRXa3RYakNWbnVXZi9n) to the prophet’s own ear, and to none other” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“And she answered, It is well—Her answer was purposely brief and vague to Gehazi, for she reserved a full disclosure of her loss for the ear of the prophet himself. She had met Gehazi at the foot of the hill, and she stopped not in her ascent till she had disburdened her heavy-laden spirit at Elisha's feet. The violent paroxysm of grief into which she fell on approaching him, appeared to Gehazi an act of disrespect to his master; he was preparing to remove her when the prophet's observant eye perceived that she was overwhelmed with some unknown cause of distress” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

27And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet:

“*She laid hold of* (clasped) *his feet*. Assuming the posture of an humble and urgent suppliant, and no doubt pouring out a flood of passionate entreaties for help.” (Ellicott’s Commentary)

28Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me

“*Did I desire a son*] The words are almost reproachful and make it clear to the prophet that the child is dead. Better had it been for her not to have had the child given to her, than now to have the great sorrow of losing him” (Cambridge Bible).

“*Did not I say, Do not deceive me? —*With vain hopes of a comfort that I should never have. And I had been much happier if I had never had it, than to lose it so quickly” (Benson Commentary).

30And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.

“*And the mother of the child said, I will not leave thee —*Until thou goest with me; for she had no great confidence in Gehazi, nor was her faith so strong as to think that the prophet could work so great a miracle at that distance, and by his staff. *And he arose, and followed her —*Being overcome by her importunity, and his tenderness toward so great a friend.” (Benson Commentary).

32 And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, *and* laid upon his bed.

“And when Elisha was come into the house,.... Of the Shunamite, and into the chamber built for him:

“behold, the child was dead, and laid upon the bed; upon his bed, and where he found it really dead” (Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, www.biblehub.com).

33 He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord.

“He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain - that he might not be interrupted during his efforts to restore the child's life (comp. ver. 4) - and prayed unto the Lord. Probably his heart had been lifted up in inarticulate prayer from the time that he realized the calamity which had befallen the Shunammite; but now he went down on his knees, and lifted up his voice in outspoken words of prayer” (Pulpit Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“*He shut the door upon them twain*— Upon himself and the dead child, that he might pray to God without interruption, and might more freely use those means which he thought fit” (Benson Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

SH 15:14-17 (to must)

Effectual invocation

    In order to pray aright, we must enter into the

closet and shut the door. We must close the lips and

silence the material senses. In the quiet

sanctuary of earnest longings, we must

SH 90:24-27

Scientific finalities

    The admission to one’s self that man is God’s own like-

ness sets man free to master the infinite idea. This con-

viction shuts the door on death, and opens it

wide towards immortality.

PROPHET. A spiritual seer; disappearance of material sense before the conscious facts of spiritual Truth. 593:4

35 Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

“*Then he returned and walked in the house —*Exercising his mind in prayer to God. *And went up,* — Repeating his former actions, to teach us not to be discouraged in our prayers, if we be not speedily answered. *And the child sneezed seven times*— Whereby his head was [cleared](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DQTJENG1Kd01YUWdjd05WQlg5WHlVUlJiWjZ1V1VYOWdaVjdUbW9rRmUyZm5RQ1dWajNjZmo3SHV0NUhhMkYwc1NpTDY0dUJINlJ0M2xOZlkvMjZ1MERYOG5RWDF1eXk0T3FpQmR6RmdLd0UvZjYrOVNHcTdSZndWVG0vUVdpdnV6UVFxSGI1Vi8yOXR2ekZrNnpiMytZ), in which his pain had chiefly lain; *and the child opened his eyes*— So the work begun in the former verse is here perfected. Although miracles were for the most part done in an instant, yet sometimes they were done by degrees” (Benson Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“*Stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times (II Kings 4:35)*

LXX says merely that the prophet stretched himself over the child seven times. Elisha did not actually lie down on—or stretch himself upon—the child. The Hebrew literally means "to bow” and denotes crouching. There is no mention of sneezing, a reading that might have slipped into the text through a scribal error. The sneezing was a sign of life—literally "breath”—in the child.”

“the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes—These were the first acts of restored respiration, and they are described as successive steps. Miracles were for the most part performed instantaneously; but sometimes, also, they were advanced progressively towards completion” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

36And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son.

“And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite; i.e**.** tell her to come here. No time was to be lost in restoring the child to his mother, now that he was alive again. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son; i.e. lift him up, take him in thine arms, feel him to be all thine own once more” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

37 Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.

“*Then she went in —*Into his chamber: and after she had thrown herself at his feet, full of humility and gratitude, and reverencing him as an angel of God, she went to the bed, *took up her son, and went out* — Publishing, no [doubt](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DQTJENG1Kd01YUWdjd05WQlg5WHlVUlJiWjZ1V1VYOWdaVjdUbW9rRmUyZFlOYjIzS2dZMmNmRTMzc01OcDFrdTdOTjhMS0E2QTlUakIvalB6Uk9XTHdzM3V4eTd4SDBONHlFOXN2UjV4QnMyWkM1MVFnbldreElsQ1lxMS9ySExaWHFBSVRVc1RENE5DOGRaMVF1aCtB), this wonderful work of God to all her family; who made it known abroad” (Benson Commentary, www.biblehub.com).