
2KINGS 4: 1 Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead. You know that your servant feared the LORD. Now the creditor has come to take for himself my two children to be slaves."

A widow of one of the prophets, oppressed by a merciless creditor, applies to Elisha, who multiplies her oil; by a part of which she pays her debt, and subsists on the rest, 2Kgs 4:1-7. His entertainment at the house of a respectable woman in Shunem, 2Kgs 4:8-10. He foretells to his hostess the birth of a son, 2Kgs 4:11-17. After some years the child dies, and the mother goes to Elisha at Carmel; he comes to Shunem, and raises the child to life, vv. 18-37. He comes to Gilgal, and prevents the sons of the prophets from being poisoned by wild gourds, 2Kgs 4:38-41. He multiplies a scanty provision, so as to make it sufficient to feed one hundred men, 2Kgs 4:42-44.

Verse 1

Now there cried a certain woman - This woman, according to the Chaldee, Jarchi, and the rabbins, was the wife of Obadiah.

Sons of the prophets - תלמידי נבייא talmidey nebiyaiya, "disciples of the prophets:" so the Targum here, and in all other places where the words occur, and properly too.

The creditor is come - This, says Jarchi, was Jehoram son of Ahab, who lent money on usury to Obadiah, because he had in the days of Ahab fed the Lord's prophets. The Targum says he borrowed money to feed these prophets, because he would not support them out of the property of Ahab.

To take unto him my two sons to be bondmen - Children, according to the laws of the Hebrews, were considered the property of their parents, who had a right to dispose of them for the payment of their debts. And in cases of poverty, the law permitted them, expressly, to sell both themselves and their children; Exo 21:7, and Lev 25:39. It was by an extension of this law, and by virtue of another, which authorized them to sell the thief who could not make restitution, Exo 22:3, that creditors were permitted to take the children of their debtors in payment. Although the law has not determined any thing precisely on this point, we see by this passage, and by several others, that this custom was common among the Hebrews. Isaiah refers to it very evidently, where he says, Which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves; Isa 50:1. And our Lord alludes to it, Mat 18:25, where he mentions the case of an insolvent debtor, Forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded Him to be Sold, and his Wife and Children, and all that he had; which shows that the custom continued among the Jews to the very end of their republic. The Romans, Athenians, and Asiatics in general had the same authority over their children as the Hebrews had: they sold them in time of poverty; and their creditors seized them as they would a sheep or an ox, or any household goods. Romulus gave the Romans an absolute power over their children which extended through the whole course of their lives, let them be in whatever situation they might. They could cast them into prison, beat, employ them as slaves in agriculture, sell them for slaves, or even take away their lives! - Dionys. Halicarn. lib. ii., pp. 96, 97.

Numa Pompilius first moderated this law, by enacting, that if a son married with the consent of his father, he should no longer have power to sell him for debt.

The emperors Diocletian and Maximilian forbade freemen to be sold on account of debt:

Ob aes alienum servire liberos creditoribus, jura non patiuntur. - Vid. Lib. ob. aes C. de obligat.

The ancient Athenians had the same right over their children as the Romans; but Solon reformed this barbarous custom. - Vid. Plutarch in Solone.

The people of Asia had the same custom, which Lucullus endeavored to check, by moderating the laws respecting usury.

The Georgians may alienate their children; and their creditors have a right to sell the wives and children of their debtors, and thus exact the uttermost farthing of their debt. - Tavernier, lib. iii., c. 9. And we have reason to believe that this custom long prevailed among the inhabitants of the British isles. See Calmet here.

In short, it appears to have been the custom of all the inhabitants of the earth. We have some remains of it yet in this country, in the senseless and pernicious custom of throwing a man into prison for debt, though his own industry and labor be absolutely necessary to discharge it, and these cannot be exercised within the loathsome and contagious walls of a prison.

2KINGS 4: 2 Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me: what do you have in the house?" She said, "Your handmaid has nothing in the house, except a pot of oil."

Verse 2

Save a pot of oil - Oil was used as aliment, for anointing the body after bathing, and to anoint the dead. Some think that this pot of oil was what this widow had kept for her burial: see Mat 26:12.

2KINGS 4: 3 Then he said, "Go, borrow containers from of all your neighbours, even empty containers. Don't borrow just a few.

2KINGS 4: 4 You shall go in, and shut the door on you and on your sons, and pour out into all those containers; and you shall set aside that which is full."

2KINGS 4: 5 So she went from him, and shut the door on her and on her sons; they brought the containers to her, and she poured out.

2KINGS 4: 6 When the containers were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another container." He said to her, "There isn't another container." The oil stopped flowing.

Verse 6

And the oil stayed - While there was a vessel to fill, there was oil sufficient; and it only ceased to flow when there was no vessel to receive it. This is a good emblem of the grace of God. While there is an empty, longing heart, there is a continual overflowing fountain of salvation. If we find in any place or at any time that the oil ceases to flow, it is because there are no empty vessels there, no souls hungering and thirsting for righteousness. We find fault with the dispensations of God's mercy, and ask, Why were the former days better than these? Were we as much in earnest for our salvation as our forefathers were for theirs, we should have equal supplies, and as much reason to sing aloud of Divine mercy.

2KINGS 4: 7 Then she came and told the man of God. He said, "Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest."

Verse 7

Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt - He does not inveigh against the cruelty of this creditor, because the law and custom of the country gave him the authority on which he acted; and rather than permit a poor honest widow to have her children sold, or that even a Philistine should suffer loss who had given credit to a genuine Israelite, he would work a miracle to pay a debt which, in the course of providence, it was out of her power to discharge.

2KINGS 4: 8 It fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman; and she persuaded him to eat bread. So it was, that as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat bread.

Verse 8

Elisha passed to Shunem - This city was in the tribe of Issachar, to the south of the brook Kishon, and at the foot of Mount Tabor.

Where was a great woman - In Pirkey Rab. Eliezer, this woman is said to have been the sister of Abishag, the Shunammite, well known in the history of David.

Instead of great woman, the Chaldee has, a woman fearing sin; the Arabic, a woman eminent for piety before God. This made her truly great.

2KINGS 4: 9 She said to her husband, "See now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, that passes by us continually.

Verse 9

This is a holy man of God - That is, a prophet, as the Chaldee interprets it.

Which passeth by us continually - It probably lay in his way to some school of the prophets that he usually attended.

2KINGS 4: 10 Please let us make a little room on the wall. Let us set for him there a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp stand. It shall be, when he comes to us, that he shall turn in there."

Verse 10

Let us make a little chamber - See the note upon Jdg 3:20 (note). As the woman was convinced that Elisha was a prophet, she knew that he must have need of more privacy than the general state of her house could afford; and therefore she proposes what she knew would be a great acquisition to him, as he could live in this little chamber in as much privacy as if he were in his own house. The bed, the table, the stool, and the candlestick, were really every thing he could need, by way of accommodation, in such circumstances.

2KINGS 4: 11 One day he came there, and he turned into the room and lay there.

2KINGS 4: 12 He said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite." When he had called her, she stood before him.

Verse 12

Gehazi his servant - This is the first time we hear of this very indifferent character.

2KINGS 4: 13 He said to him, "Say now to her, 'Behold, you have cared for us with all this care. What is to be done for you? Would you like to be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the army?'" She answered, "I dwell among my own people."

Verse 13

Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king - Elisha must have had considerable influence with the king, from the part he took in the late war with the Moabites. Jehoram had reason to believe that the prophet, under God, was the sole cause of his success, and therefore he could have no doubt that the king would grant him any reasonable request.

Or to the captain of the host? - As if he had said, Wilt thou that I should procure thee and thy husband a place at court, or get any of thy friends a post in the army?

I dwell among mine own people - I am perfectly satisfied and contented with my lot in life; I live on the best terms with my neighbors, and am here encompassed with my kindred, and feel no disposition to change my connections or place of abode.

How few are there like this woman on the earth! Who would not wish to be recommended to the king's notice, or get a post for a relative in the army, etc.? Who would not like to change the country for the town, and the rough manners of the inhabitants of the villages for the polished conversation and amusements of the court? Who is so contented with what he has as not to desire more? Who trembles at the prospect of riches; or believes there are any snares in an elevated state, or in the company and conversation of the great and honorable? How few are there that will not sacrifice every thing - peace, domestic comfort, their friends, their conscience, and their God - for money, honors, grandeur, and parade?

2KINGS 4: 14 He said, "What then is to be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "Most certainly she has no son, and her husband is old."

Verse 14

What then is to be done for her? - It seems that the woman retired as soon as she had delivered the answer mentioned in the preceding verse.

2KINGS 4: 15 He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the door.

2KINGS 4: 16 He said, "At this season, when the time comes around, you will embrace a son." She said, "No, my lord, you man of God, do not lie to your handmaid."

Verse 16

Thou shalt embrace a son - This promise, and the circumstances of the parties, are not very dissimilar to that relative to the birth of Isaac, and those of Abraham and Sarah.

Do not lie - That is, Let thy words become true; or, as the rabbins understand it, Do not mock me by giving me a son that shall soon be removed by death; but let me have one that shall survive me.

2KINGS 4: 17 The woman conceived, and bore a son at that season, when the time came around, as Elisha had said to her.

2KINGS 4: 18 When the child was grown, one day he went out to his father to the reapers.

Verse 18

When the child was grown - We know not of what age he was, very likely four or six, if not more years; for he could go out to the reapers in the harvest field, converse, etc.

2KINGS 4: 19 He said to his father, "My head! My head!" He said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother."

Verse 19

My head, my head - Probably affected by the coup de soleil, or sun stroke, which might, in so young a subject, soon occasion death, especially in that hot country.

2KINGS 4: 20 When he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees until noon, and then died.

2KINGS 4: 21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door on him, and went out.

Verse 21

Laid him on the bed of the man of God - She had no doubt heard that Elijah had raised the widow's son of Zarephath to life; and she believed that he who had obtained this gift from God for her, could obtain his restoration to life.

2KINGS 4: 22 She called to her husband, and said, "Please send me one of the servants, and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God, and come again."

2KINGS 4: 23 He said, "Why would you want go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath." She said, "It's alright."

Verse 23

Wherefore wilt thou go - She was a very prudent woman; she would not harass the feelings of her husband by informing him of the death of his son till she had tried the power of the prophet. Though the religion of the true God was not the religion of the state, yet there were no doubt multitudes of the people who continued to worship the true God alone, and were in the habit of going, as is here intimated, on new moons and Sabbaths, to consult the prophet.

2KINGS 4: 24 Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, "Drive, and go forward! Don't slow down for me, unless I ask you to."

Verse 24

Drive, and go forward - It is customary in the East for a servant to walk along side or drive the ass his master rides. Sometimes he walks behind, and goads on the beast; and when it is to turn, he directs its head with the long pole of the goad. It is probably to this custom that the wise man alludes when he says, "I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking as servants on the earth," on the ground.

2KINGS 4: 25 So she went, and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her afar off, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Behold, there is the Shunammite."

2KINGS 4: 26 Please run now to meet her, and ask her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?'" She answered, "It is well."

Verse 26

It is well - How strong was her faith in God and submission to his authority! Though the heaviest family affliction that could befall her and her husband had now taken place; yet, believing that it was a dispensation of Providence which was in itself neither unwise nor unkind, she said, It is well with

me, with my husband, and with my child. We may farther remark that, in her days, the doctrine of reprobate infants had not disgraced the pure religion of the God of endless compassion. She had no doubts concerning the welfare of her child, even with respect to another world; and who but a pagan or a stoic can entertain a contrary doctrine?

2KINGS 4: 27 When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. Gehazi came near to thrust her away; but the man of God said, "Leave her alone; for her soul is troubled within her; and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me."

Verse 27

The Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me - In reference to this point he had not now the discernment of spirits. This, and the gift of prophecy, were influences which God gave and suspended as his infinite wisdom saw good.

2KINGS 4: 28 Then she said, "Did I desire a son of my lord? Didn't I say, Do not deceive me?"

Verse 28

Did I desire a son of my lord? - I expressed no such wish to thee; I was contented and happy; and when thou didst promise me a son, did I not say, Do not deceive me? Do not mock me with a child which shall grow up to be attractive and engaging, but of whom I shall soon be deprived by death.

2KINGS 4: 29 Then he said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand, and go your way. If you meet any man, don't greet him; and if anyone greets you, don't answer him again. Then lay my staff on the face of the child."

Verse 29

Salute him not - Make all the haste thou possibly canst, and lay my staff on the face of the child; he probably thought that it might be a case of mere suspended animation or a swoon, and that laying the staff on the face of the child might act as a stimulus to excite the animal motions.

2KINGS 4: 30 The mother of the child said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you."

He arose, and followed her.

Verse 30

I will not leave thee - The prophet it seems had no design to accompany her; he intended to wait for Gehazi's return; but as the woman was well assured the child was dead, she was determined not to return till she brought the prophet with her.

2KINGS 4: 31 Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Therefore he returned to meet him, and told him, saying, "The child has not awakened."

2KINGS 4: 32 When Elisha had come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid on his bed.

Verse 32

Behold, the child was dead - The prophet then saw that the body and spirit of the child were separated.

2KINGS 4: 33 He went in therefore, and shut the door on them both, and prayed to the LORD.

Verse 33

Prayed unto the Lord - He had no power of his own by which he could restore the child.

2KINGS 4: 34 He went up, and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, and his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. He stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child grew warm.

Verse 34

Lay upon the child - Endeavored to convey a portion of his own natural warmth to the body of the child; and probably endeavored, by blowing into the child's mouth, to inflate the lungs, and restore respiration. He uses every natural means in his power to restore life, while praying to the Author of it to exert a miraculous influence. Natural means are in our power; those that are supernatural belong to God. We should always do our own work, and beg of God to do his.

2KINGS 4: 35 Then he returned, and walked in the house once back and forth; and went up, and stretched himself on him. Then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

Verse 35

The child sneezed seven times - That is, it sneezed abundantly. When the nervous influence began to act on the muscular system, before the circulation could be in every part restored, particular muscles, if not the whole body, would be thrown into strong contractions and shiverings, and sternutation or sneezing would be a natural consequence; particularly as obstructions must have

taken place in the head and its vessels, because of the disorder of which the child died. Most people, as well as philosophers and physicians, have remarked how beneficial sneezings are to the removal of obstructions in the head. Sternutamenta, says Pliny, Hist. Nat., lib. xxviii., cap. 6, gravedinem capitis emendant; "Sneezing relieves disorders of the head."

2KINGS 4: 36 He called Gehazi, and said, "Call this Shunammite!" So he called her. When she had come in to him, he said, "Take up your son."

2KINGS 4: 37 Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground; and she took up her son, and went out.

Verse 37

She went in and fell at his feet - Few can enter into the feelings of this noble woman. What suspense must she have felt during the time that the prophet was employed in the slow process referred to above! for slow in its own nature it must have been, and exceedingly exhausting to the prophet himself.

2KINGS 4: 38 Elisha came again to Gilgal. There was a famine in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to his servant, "Set on the great pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets."

Verse 38

Came again to Gilgal - He had been there before with his master, a short time prior to his translation.

Set on the great pot and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets - It was in a time of dearth, and all might now stand in need of refreshment; and it appears that the prophet was led to put forth the power he had from God to make a plentiful provision for those who were present. The father of the celebrated Dr. Young, author of the Night Thoughts, preaching a charity sermon for the benefit of the sons of the clergy, took the above words for his text; nor could they be said to be inappropriate.

2KINGS 4: 39 One went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered of it wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of stew; for they didn't recognise them.

Verse 39

Wild gourds - This is generally thought to be the coloquintida, the fruit of a plant of the same name, about the size of a large orange. It is brought hither from the Levant, and is often known by the name of the bitter apple; both the seeds and pulp are intensely bitter, and violently purgative. It

ranks among vegetable poisons, as all intense bitters do; but, judiciously employed, it is of considerable use in medicine.

2KINGS 4: 40 So they poured out for the men to eat. As they were eating some of the stew, they cried out, and said, "Man of God, there is death in the pot!" They could not eat of it.

Verse 40

There is death in the pot - As if they had said, "We have here a deadly mixture; if we eat of it, we shall all die."

2KINGS 4: 41 But he said, "Then bring meal." He cast it into the pot; and he said, "Pour out for the people, that they may eat." There was no harm in the pot.

Verse 41

Bring meal - Though this might, in some measure, correct the strong acrid and purgative quality; yet it was only a miracle which could make a lapful of this fruit shred into pottage salutary.

2KINGS 4: 42 A man from Baal Shalishah came, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. He said, "Give to the people, that they may eat."

Verse 42

Bread of the first-fruits - This was an offering to the prophet, as the first-fruits themselves were an offering to God.

Corn in the husk - Probably parched corn or corn to be parched, a very frequent food in the East; full ears, before they are ripe, parched on the fire.

2KINGS 4: 43 His servant said, "What, should I set this before a hundred men?"

But he said, "Give the people, that they may eat; for thus says the LORD, 'They will eat, and will have some left over.'"

Verse 43

Thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof - It was God, not the prophet, who fed one hundred men with these twenty loaves, etc. This is something like our Lord's feeding the multitude miraculously. Indeed, there are many things in this chapter similar to facts in our Lord's

history: and this prophet might be more aptly considered a type of our Lord, than most of the other persons in the Scriptures who have been thus honored.

2KINGS 4: 44 So he set it before them, and they ate, and left some of it, according to the LORD's word.
