

The Poisoned Stew and the Prophet's Bread

2 Kings 4:38-44

2 Kings 4:38-44 – *“And Elisha returned to Gilgal, and there was a famine in the land. Now the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to his servant, ‘Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets.’ So one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, though they did not know what they were. Then they served it to the men to eat. Now it happened, as they were eating the stew, that they cried out and said, ‘Man of God, there is death in the pot!’ And they could not eat it. So he said, ‘Then bring some flour.’ And he put it into the pot, and said, ‘Serve it to the people, that they may eat.’ And there was nothing harmful in the pot.*

Then a man came from Baal Shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain in his knapsack. And he said, ‘Give it to the people, that they may eat.’ But his servant said, ‘What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?’ He said again, ‘Give it to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the LORD: ‘They shall eat and have some left over.’” So he set it before them; and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.”

Background Notes

Gilgal was the setting for these two miracles at the end of 2 Kings 4. These miracles took place at the “Gilgal School of the Prophets” - Gilgal Seminary, or Gilgal Bible College (v38).

In the first miracle, one of the seminary students had put some wild gourds into the stew by mistake, and Elisha purified the poisoned stew by pouring in some flour. In the other miracle, some new grain and twenty loaves of bread were multiplied to feed one hundred students.

There's a Bible trivia question for you in this chapter! Ask someone who thinks they know the Bible: “Have you ever heard of ‘the feeding of the one hundred’?”

Doctrinal Points

1. More of Christ is the solution to false teaching.

Where do we see that truth taught in these miracles? We need to recognize an important truth about miracles. Just as **all the miracles of our Lord Jesus had spiritual lessons associated with them**, this was also true with the miracles of Elisha. So the proper question to ask after we've read these two miracles is: What is spiritual picture that we should see in these miracles?

The first clue here is the flour in the first miracle, and the bread and grain in the second miracle. Those were the things that brought relief to the poisoned stew and the famine situation at Gilgal.

The five Old Testament offerings described in Leviticus 1-5 are: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. All of these offerings picture Christ in various aspects of His personal work.

Throughout Scripture, meal (flour), bread, and grain often represent Christ, or the Word of God that proclaims Christ. In the Old Testament offerings, the fine flour (or meal) offering is a picture of the Lord Jesus in His moral perfections, as the sinless Son of God.

In John 6 the Lord Jesus Himself stated that the manna of the Old Testament was a picture of Him as the Bread of Life. *"I am the Bread of Life,"* the Lord Jesus proclaimed.

So with the background that throughout Scripture, the flour, meal, grain, and bread pictures the Lord Jesus, or the Word of God proclaiming the Lord Jesus, I think we can begin to see the spiritual picture in these miracles. There was a famine in the land. In the same way today, spiritual famine can come into the hearts and lives of God's people - spiritual hunger. And part of the reason can be the poison of false teaching.

The wild gourds can represent false teaching. Believers should be careful not to recognize the wild gourds of false teaching – that's poison! The wild gourds were mixed into a wholesome stew. So the wild gourds represent false teaching mixed in with the good food of solid biblical teaching.

Notice that the seminary student did not mean to poison the stew. His intentions were good. In the same way, false teaching sometimes gets mixed into good teaching = by careless biblical interpretation, or even by a preacher's imagination. Unfortunately, sometimes the poisonous mixture starts in seminaries.

What's the solution to false teaching? **"More of Christ"** is the solution to false teaching! More of Christ is the solution to false teaching. Elisha didn't try to take out the wild gourds. He added the flour, or meal, to the stew. In the same way, the solution for false teaching today is adding more of Christ. The solution is not to throw the whole stew out. Add more Christ, and the poison will be neutralized!

Take Christian counseling, for example. Christian counseling is good if its principles are in line with Scripture. But unfortunately some "wild gourds" have been added to the "stew" of Christian counseling. Humanistic psychology has been mixed in with biblical principles. The idea that man is basically good has been mixed in to some areas of Christian counseling. The idea that people are not personally responsible for their actions has been mixed in to some Christian counseling. The idea that there's no hell and eternal punishment for sin has been mixed in to some Christian counseling.

What's the solution? Throw Christian counseling out? No! Christian counseling can be good and very helpful. **The solution is more Bible - more of Christ!** Christian counseling must be Christ-centered and biblically based, and the wild gourds will be edged out. More of Christ is the solution to false teaching.

2. More of Christ is the solution to spiritual famine.

The same basic lesson is found in the second miracle, in the multiplication of the grain and the twenty loaves of bread. The spiritual picture is that **"more of Christ"** is the solution to famine. More grain, more bread was the solution to the famine in Gilgal. The picture is that more of Christ is the solution to spiritual famine.

In the second miracle, while we have the same basic lesson - more of Christ - we can make an interesting additional point here, again from the Old Testament. The Old Testament Feast of First Fruits came three days after Passover. During the Feast of First Fruits, sheaves of the first newly ripened grain were presented before the Lord.

I think we can see then the spiritual picture emerging here. The Passover is certainly a picture of Christ in His death. The Feast of First Fruits - three days later - pictures Christ in His resurrection. The bread of the first fruits and the sheaves of newly ripened grain may picture Christ in His resurrection.

As the flour or meal of the first miracle pictured Christ in His moral perfections as the Son of God, so the bread of the first fruits and the new grain picture the resurrected Christ. More of Christ is the solution to spiritual famine.

More of Christ is the solution to false teaching, and more of Christ is the solution to spiritual famine.

Practical Applications

1. Let's watch out for wild vines.

The problem of the poisonous stew would not have happened if the student of the school of the prophets had been more careful. The wild gourds came from a wild vine. Maybe this student should have taken some brothers who knew their vines along with him!

We need to watch out for wild vines. If the wild gourds represent false teaching, the wild vines from which the gourds came represent the source of false teaching. **The source of all false teaching is Satan and his world system. Any worldview that is not the Christian worldview is really a wild vine - a vine that produces poisonous fruit!**

Illustration: Some Christians today think they can read the Big Bang theory or the theory of evolution into the Creation account in Genesis. Does either of these theories truly emerge from Scripture? Are these theories part of the Christian worldview that comes from Scripture? No way!

Those theories are wild gourds! They don't come naturally out of the Bible. They are the fruit of wild vines. They come from satanic worldviews. They are "read into" the Bible, and they poison sound, orthodox, biblical teaching. They are **not** part of the Christian worldview - not part of the worldview that is taught in the Bible. Let's watch out for wild vines!

2. Let's be more like the man from Baal Shalisha.

The man who brought the grain and the twenty loaves of bread came from Baal Shalisha. It appears that this town was named Shalisha back in the days of Samuel. But over the years, with idolatry coming into the northern kingdom of Israel, it had become known as Baal Shalisha. How much like our own country today! Once our country functioned on solid biblical principles, but today all kinds of idolatry have crept in.

The man who brought bread and grain to the student prophets at Gilgal was concerned about the needs of God's people. Even though this man was surrounded by all kinds of ungodliness, yet he was faithful. And he was concerned about the needs of the Lord's people. Even during the famine, he gave what he had to the Lord's work.

Suppose this man had reasoned, "I don't have that much. What good will these twenty loaves be for one hundred men?" Or, "Maybe I'd better keep it for myself. After all, it's a famine. I may run out." That's the way some Christians reason - but that's not the way the man from Baal Shalisha reasoned.

Think of this man not only in terms of helping to meet the physical needs of the Lord's work. Think in terms of meeting spiritual needs as well. Can you teach Sunday school, but you're not doing it? Can you teach a Bible study, but you're not doing it? Is there some way you can be involved in providing for the Lord's people? Can you help meet the spiritual needs of the Lord's people with your spiritual gifts, but you're not doing it?

Let's be more like the man from Baal Shalisha!