

Bears, Blood and Oil

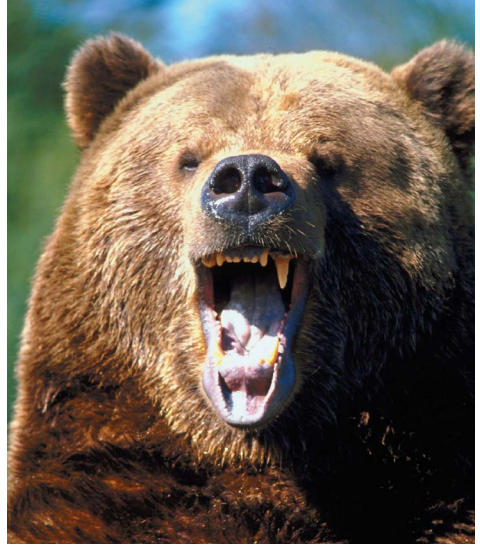
ELISHA was now on his own as the prophet of the Lord God. It very quickly became obvious that he was a true prophet of the Lord, demonstrating the ability to do miracles on an impressive scale. The first was shortly after Elijah was taken away.

Elisha was still in Jericho and the leaders of the city came to him telling him about the poor quality of their local water, which also led to poor crops. Elisha asked for a new bowl and told them to put salt into it. They then went to the spring which provided the town's water, and Elisha threw the salt into the spring with the words:

Thus says the LORD: 'I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness' (2 Kings 2:21).

There follows a brief comment that the waters remained healed right up to the time when the record was written: this was no flash-in-the-pan miracle; the Lord God really did heal the waters.

The next incident in Elisha's life was not so pleasant. He returned to Bethel – then a centre of false religion – and was met by some lads who were very rude, jeering at him, “Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!” (v23). They were not little boys, but a large group of youths, who knew exactly what they were saying and doing. Elisha looked back at them and cursed them in God's name.



Following this, two female bears came from the woods, and mauled forty-two of the lads. Whether this means they were killed is not entirely certain.

This is a strong warning about the way we should behave. Elisha was now the representative of the Lord God, and he was to be treated as such.

Four Kings

Elisha went north to Mount Carmel, and then returned to Samaria, which would be his base for a while. There are later references to “Elisha's house” (2 Kings 5:9), so he seems to have had a home of his own.

From here the prophet became involved in a dispute which involved four kings: Mesha, king of Moab, Jehoram (sometimes called Joram) of Israel, Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom.

The problem arose when Mesha refused to give to Jehoram the tribute he was expected to pay annually as a subject king. This was quite large: 100,000 lambs, and the wool from 100,000 rams. Jehoram sent a message to Jehoshaphat, asking him to join him and subdue Moab once more. Jehoshaphat readily acceded to his request and they were joined by the king of Edom. They marched for seven days, and then found themselves with a large army in waterless desert, which had dire implications for their men and their animals.

At this point reason prevailed, and Jehoshaphat asked if they did not have a prophet by whom they could ask for God's guidance. Jehoram's servants knew of the existence of Elisha, and that he had succeeded Elijah. Jehoshaphat agreed for he knew *"the word of the LORD is with him."* (2 Kings 3:12).

All three kings, from Israel, Edom and Judah, went off in search of Elisha. When they found him, he was dismissive of them all, suggesting they should go to their own prophets. They should have consulted a prophet of the true God before they had set off. He said to Jehoram:

As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of

Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you, nor see you (v14).

Elisha then asked for a musician to be brought, and when the musician played, he received a message from God. It was a very favourable answer, far better than they deserved.

Thus says the LORD: 'Make this valley full of ditches.' For thus says the LORD: 'You shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you, your cattle, and your animals may drink.' And this is a simple matter in the sight of the LORD; He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand. Also you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city, and shall cut down every good tree, and stop up every spring of water, and ruin every good piece of land with stones (v16-19).

A Valley Of Blood

Just as God had promised, so it happened. The next morning, water appeared miraculously and filled the area. There was no further danger of death from thirst.

There was another amazing side effect of the vast quantities of water which God provided. The Moabites had begun to prepare for the battle, and were getting into formation at the border, when the sun began to rise. The glowing of the sun caused the water to appear like pools of blood, and they assumed there had been a deadly falling out amongst the three kings. The Moabites set off for the combined camp, intent on taking plunder from their dead enemies.

But the Israelites were not dead. As the Moabites poured into their camp, they were easily able to defeat them, and drive them back to Kir-hareseth, deep in the territory of Moab. They did tremendous damage to the land on the way.

The king of Moab, in a desperate attempt to retrieve the situation offered his own son as a sacrifice. Offerings to the idol god Molech were always by fire. This was abhorrent to God, something the people of Israel were strictly forbidden to do:

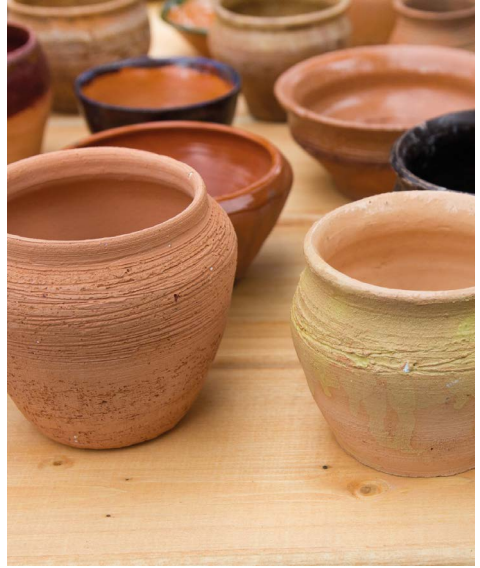
You shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD (Leviticus 18:21).

Israel withdrew from Moab and returned to their own land. It was not the finest point in Israel's history, but proved once again that the word of God through his prophets always comes true.

A Jar of Oil

Elisha was soon involved in another miracle. The wife of one of the sons of the prophets (a group set up to teach the people about God) had been widowed and had no means of support. Sadly, it was not an unusual thing to happen. To make matters worse there was a creditor who was determined to find some way to retrieve what he was owed, even if it meant taking her two sons as slaves. She appealed to Elisha for help.

He asked what she had in the house, to receive the reply that she had nothing but



a jar of oil. The prophet told her to go and borrow all the empty containers she could. Then, back at home, and with the doors firmly shut she began to pour oil from her own jar. She poured it into the borrowed vessels, and miraculously the oil kept pouring until they were all full. Then it stopped.

She went to the man of God and told him what had happened. Elisha told her to go and sell the oil so she could pay her debts, and then live off the balance. It was a living miracle reminiscent of the time when Elijah had enabled the widow of Zarephath, her son and himself to live during the famine. The time of the two prophets Elijah and Elisha was a time of many miracles, all achieved by the power of God.

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