

Week 11: *Elisha Feeds the Hungry: 2 Kings 4:38–44*

Hook



Main Point: Main Point: God provides for every need, and even more than we can ask or imagine.

According to a 2025 YouGov survey, the following are the 10 most popular American dishes:

10. Apple Pie
9. Fried Chicken
8. Corn on the Cob
7. Grilled Cheese
6. Hash Browns
5. Cheeseburger
4. Steak and Baked Potato
3. Hamburger
2. Mashed Potatoes
1. French Fries¹

Q: Do you agree with the survey? Are your favorites on this list?

Q: If money was no object, what foods would be on the menu for your dream meal?

Transition: It's interesting – when you look at that list, almost everything on it is simple, familiar and comforting. These aren't just foods we eat to survive; they're foods we *love*, foods we turn to when we're hungry, tired or just want to be satisfied.

And that raises an important question for us: What do we do when those basic needs – like food – aren't guaranteed? What happens when there isn't enough ... or worse, when what you have isn't even safe to eat?

That's exactly the kind of situation we step into in 2 Kings 4. There's a famine in the land. Hunger is real. Resources are limited. And in one moment, even the food they *do* have becomes dangerous. But in the middle of need, scarcity and uncertainty, God shows something powerful: He is not limited by what's on the table ... He is the One who provides it.

RECAP: In the first lesson, we talked about the role of the Old Testament prophets as God's messengers calling His people to repent and how they pointed ahead to Jesus. In week 2, we saw God's provision for both Elijah and the widow of Zarephath during the drought, which was a consequence of Israel's idolatry. In lesson 3, God raised the widow's son from the dead, which not only showed His sovereign power but also His care for the vulnerable and His heart for all the nations. In lesson 4, we saw God's superiority over other "gods" as Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. In lesson 5, Elijah ran for his life from the wrath of Jezebel and found refuge in the Lord. God spoke to Him not in the thunder and lightning but in the still, small voice.

In lesson 6, Elijah called Elisha to succeed him, and Elisha left his old life behind. Then Elijah prophesied the deaths of Jezebel and Ahab but delayed the end of Ahab's dynasty because he repented. Ahab's first son died because he worshipped false gods, and his second son became king. In lesson 7, Elijah was taken up to heaven in the whirlwind, and Elisha took over his ministry with the same Holy Spirit upon him. In lesson 8, we explored exactly what it meant when Elisha asked Elijah for a "double portion" of his spirit. In lessons 9 and 10, we saw how God brings judgment on those who reject His prophets and His message but brings life, healing and blessing to those who come to Him in faith.

In this lesson, we will see God feed the hungry through two miracles, neutralizing the poison in the stew and multiplying food as Jesus did in the New Testament.

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Book

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2 Kings 4:38-41 [Read]

Talking Point 1: God reverses the curse and brings healing, restoration and life.

Q: Who were the people Elisha's miracle fed? What does this tell us about God?

Q: How does this account show God reversing a curse?

We read here that Elisha went back to Gilgal to meet with the school of prophets there. In many of these historical accounts, Elisha visited the schools of the prophets in different cities. This is at least one reason he often traveled through Shunem. His home was in Samaria, the capital city, where he could speak God's Word to the king (2 Kings 5:3, 9). Yet he also seemed to have a home base on Mount Carmel (2 Kings 2:25); this is where the Shunammite woman went to find him (2 Kings 4:25). Mount Carmel was spiritually significant because of Elijah's standoff with the prophets of Baal there. It was also an ideal place to withdraw for reflection, rest and prayer; prophets often went up mountains to get away and connect with God. Mount Carmel overlooks the Jezreel Valley, a central crossroads of Northern Israel. From there Elisha could easily travel all over Israel and down to Judah.

Gilgal is where the second generation of Israelites had recommitted to the covenant, after crossing the Jordan, before taking the land in the conquest. It was in Judah, near Jericho, where they had their first battle (Joshua 5–6). It's close to where Elisha performed his first miracles – crossing the Jordan, then healing the water at Jericho. Now he was back in that area, meeting with the prophets in Gilgal, and there was a famine. Elisha told Gehazi to make a stew, and one of the prophets put in unfamiliar gourds he had found, which caused the stew to be poisonous.

Just as he had thrown salt into the water at Jericho, Elisha threw flour into the pot of stew, and it healed the poison. In the same way salt would have only made the waters of Jericho even more undrinkable, there is no natural reason flour could have done anything other than thicken the stew. It was not the flour; it was the supernatural power of God. The pagan magicians actually believed flour had magical powers to remove evil magic. But they had to do rituals and incantations to try to make it work; Elisha just threw the flour in the pot.² This reflects Elijah on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal did all this shouting, dancing and even self-flagellation in their attempts to entice Baal to come, but all Elijah did was pray, and God sent down fire. By using flour, Elisha was showing God's superiority over these other "gods."

The poisonous gourd is described in the story as a “wild vine,” the same phrase used in Jeremiah to describe how Israel had turned away from the Lord (Jeremiah 2:21). In the Old Testament, God often described Israel using the imagery of a vine He had planted and cultivated but that had turned bad and was not bearing good fruit as it should have (Psalm 80:8–9; Isaiah 5:1–7). The text doesn’t explicitly tell us this was meant to symbolize Israel’s idolatry, but prophets’ actions often illustrated their message. This wild vine brought death to the stew reflecting the way Israel’s idolatry would bring them death. This shows God’s power and His provision for His people during a famine, but it also illustrates how dangerous idolatry can be.

Q: How has God provided for you in hard times? How has He brought healing in your life?

Q: What things in your life have the potential to become dangerous for you? How can you trust God to protect you from them?

2 Kings 4:42–44 and John 6:1–15 [Read]

Talking Point 2: God can miraculously provide everything we need and more.

Q: How many loaves did the man bring to Elisha? How do these numbers compare to what Jesus used to feed the people in the New Testament?

Q: What does it tell us about God that they had food left over?

This account clearly foreshadows what Christ would do on at least two occasions, the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000. But this story has very different numbers of both bread and people. In this story, Gehazi was shocked that Elisha asked him to give only 20 loaves of bread to 100 men. The Hebrew in this verse calls this gift to Elisha “the bread of the firstfruits,” which is the firstfruit offering the people were supposed to take to the temple. The man brought the gift to Elisha, bypassing the spiritual leadership in Israel (N), who were leading people astray from the Lord.³ This man came from the town of Baal-Shalishah, “three Baals,” a town in Israel (N) where the people were worshipping Baal rather than God (the temple was in Judah [S]). The offering was supposed to be two loaves; this was 10 times that, either 10 years’ worth of offerings or offerings from 10 faithful families in Baal-Shalishah.

In the temple, the priests waved the bread of the firstfruits before the Lord and then ate them. Some sacrifices of the temple were burned completely to the Lord, but some were given to the priests since they didn’t have their own portion of the land to grow their own food (Numbers 18:12–13). Elisha told Gehazi to give these loaves to the prophets to eat, 100 men. Twenty loaves of bread may sound like a lot, but these loaves were small individual loaves. Gehazi was shocked; this amount of bread would never feed 100 men. But Elisha said the Lord had told him they would eat their fill and even have some left over, which is exactly what happened. This was Elisha again pointing to

God as the source of power, not himself. God supernaturally multiplied the loaves. As He did with Joseph in Genesis and Elijah earlier in Kings, God provided for them even in the middle of a famine.

This miracle was about God reversing the curse of the famine for those who were faithful to Him. Like He multiplied the widow's oil after the death of her husband, brought life to the Shunammite woman by giving her a son and later raising him from the dead, and then healed the poisoned stew. All of this points to God bringing life, healing, and restoration where there is death and destruction. He didn't just provide what they needed, He gave them even more.

When Jesus multiplied the five loaves and two fish to feed the 5,000 men plus the women and children with them, the people in the crowd would have known that Elisha multiplied the loaves for his prophet-disciples. This amount of food for this number of people was even more shocking; it was one-fourth the amount of food and 50 times the number of people. Jesus' miracle was 200 times as big as Elisha's! This would have been a very clear message about Jesus for anyone familiar with the Old Testament, which would have been everyone in the crowd. Elisha was an incredible man of God who did more recorded miracles than anyone else in Scripture, but Jesus was exponentially greater than Elisha. He was more than a prophet; He was the Bread of Life who came down from heaven to give life to the world (John 6:33).⁴

The purpose of the firstfruit offering was to acknowledge God as the One who had given them the land and the harvest. It also showed faith that He would continue to provide for them in the future when the first and best were brought to Him. In Elisha's miracle and later in Jesus', God showed His people just that. He will provide everything we need when we seek His kingdom first (Matthew 6:33). He can bless us with even more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). In this story, the very thing the man offered became God's provision for His people. God took what the man offered in faith and multiplied it for the good of His people. He can do the same with the resources we offer Him in faith; He can use it and even multiply it to bless the world and build His kingdom.

Q: What are some factors in today's world that can make it challenging to fully trust God?

Q: What does it look like practically to seek His kingdom first today?

Deuteronomy 8 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Wilderness times teach us to trust God for everything.

Q: What did God teach His people in the wilderness?

Q: Why might the people forget what they learned when they got into the land?

In Deuteronomy, God was preparing the second generation coming out of the Exodus to finally enter the Promised Land. He warned them about the temptations they would face to follow other gods, and He renewed His covenant with them. This generation had grown up completely in the wilderness as a nomadic people, supernaturally fed manna from heaven. They knew no other way of life, though they had heard stories about their parents' time in Egypt. They had never needed to plant crops because of the manna. The manna stopped the day after they first ate the produce of the Promised Land (Joshua 5:12).

Manna was a wonderful, miraculous provision, and not having to grow crops made their lives easier. Can you imagine having your food just fall from the sky? Yet they had also grown tired of the manna and whined about how boring it was to eat the same thing all the time (Numbers 11:4–6). God's response was twofold. He sent a plague as a consequence for their ingratitude, but He also sent them quail in abundance to satisfy their desire for meat. This story is a powerful lesson about being content with what you have been given and to recognize the daily blessings of God's grace even when they don't seem exciting.

Now they were about to enter the Promised Land, and God was warning them that when they arrived, they would be tempted to turn away from Him. They had spent 40 years depending on Him for their daily bread, but when they entered the land, they would grow their own crops and begin to feel self-sufficient. God said when they came into the land, they would "eat bread without scarcity" and lack nothing. But it would be easy to forget it was the Lord who provided all those things when they were no longer falling from the sky, just as it can be easy to give ourselves credit for our successes in life and all that we have worked hard to earn and forget that even our talent, work ethic and resources come from God. It is God who gives us the power to earn wealth (v. 18). He wants to provide for us abundantly. But the more we experience material abundance, the easier it can be to rely on ourselves instead of Him (Matthew 19:23–24).

Moses told the people that God gave them this time in the wilderness where they were fed by manna to teach them that man does not live by bread alone but by God's Word (v. 3). This time humbled and tested them to expose what was truly in their heart, not just their lip service to Him (v. 2). The hardships they experienced were not meaningless suffering; they were part of God's process of forming a people who would trust Him. Hunger became a tool in His hands. This same principle was illustrated centuries later when Elisha multiplied the loaves. The situation looked just like the wilderness – hunger,

scarcity, uncertainty. And again, God showed that His word, not the amount of bread, determined whether His people had enough.

The people did exactly what God predicted; they became comfortable in the land and forgot God. It had been more than 600 years since that wilderness generation, and they had been worshipping false gods off and on the entire time. Elijah had been sent to warn them, and the first thing he did was announce a famine. God was making them hungry again so they would understand their need for His provision. The curses of the covenant were never just about punishment; they were always about bringing people back to the Lord. God wanted to show them very clearly that provision comes from Him, not from Baal or any other “god” or from ourselves. It is in “wilderness times” that we are forced to depend on God. That is how David learned God was His refuge and strength, by the many years he spent in the wilderness (Psalm 46; 57; 62; 71; 73; et. al.).

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people struggled with understanding that man does not live by bread alone and learning to really trust in God. We see the repeating pattern of the people’s forgetting about God when things were going well for them and crying out to Him when things were hard (Judges 2:16–23). But when the story gets to Jesus, He is the One who finally got it. When Satan tempted Him to turn the stones to bread, He answered with this verse, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). He not only understood the truth, He embodied it. Jesus is both the Bread of Life and the Word of God by which we live. He is our model for trusting in God and the One we trust to save us and bring us life.

Q: How have you learned to trust God through times of suffering, struggle or wilderness in your life? Share some examples.

Q: What might it look like to trust in God to provide for you rather than depending on your own strength, wisdom, etc.? How can we balance trusting in God with working hard to provide for our families?

Q: In what comfortable areas of life do you need to prayer for the discomfort of God to stir you to follow Him? Are there any areas of discomfort that you need to thank God for?

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Took

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Teacher, as you close out the lesson, be mindful of the needs that are in the room. In closing, you might pray over a member who is battling an illness, perhaps break your LifeGroup into smaller units and invite them to share their needs and pray for one another, or you might challenge them to allow God's Word to minister to them and remind them that God meets needs.

Financial Stress: Philippians 4:19 – “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Weariness: Matthew 11:28 – “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Hopelessness: Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Lack of Direction: Proverbs 3:5–6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Fear: John 14:27 – “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Physical Struggles: Psalm 73:26 – “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

Guilt: 1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about what it means to really trust God for everything, both materially and spiritually. What does that look like practically in your daily life? What experiences have helped you trust God more? How has God shown you that you can trust Him? What needs or concerns do you have right now that you need to put in His hands? Who in

your life do you think really knows how to trust God? What can you learn from him or her?

PRAY: Pray for those who are experiencing times of wilderness, struggle or suffering, Ask God to use that time to draw them closer to Him. Pray for yourself to learn to trust God more. Ask Him to give you opportunities to learn trust.

ACT: Be a provider. Sometimes God supernaturally provides, and sometimes He uses other people to provide for us in our times of need. Think about someone you know who is in need and how God may be able to use you to provide for that person. Then do it!

¹ <https://yougov.com/en-us/ratings/american-dishes>

² John Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 2000).

³ Paul R. House, [*1, 2 Kings*](#), vol. 8, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 268–269.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary, 1991).