

The Shunamites land restored

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Howard Stone

[0 : 00] 2nd Kings chapter 8, we'll read the first six verses. 3rd Kings chapter 8, we'll read the first six verses.

3rd Kings chapter 9, we'll read the first six verses.

3rd Kings chapter 9, we'll read the first six verses. 4th Kings chapter 9, we'll read the first six verses.

5th Kings chapter 9, we'll read the first six verses. 5th Kings chapter 10, we'll read the first six verses. 6th Kings chapter 10, we'll read the first six verses. 6th Kings chapter 10, we'll read the first six verses.

6th Kings chapter 10, we'll read the first six verses. 7th Kings chapter 10, we'll read the first six verses. 7th Kings chapter 10, we'll read the first six verses.

7th Kings chapter 11, which is called the Christ-Cross 17. Rawson 18 – 18 and 2nd Kings chapter 13, we'll read the first six verses. 7th Kings – Spiritual Six verses. 8th Kings – we'll read the first six verses. 7th Kings ... Temperature 12 swatches of Jesus. 7th Kings – Elijah is one himself at-barbell card personally. 8th Kings – Milton 87 – Mount the King Abraham extension as, with the first convergence of a God will be caring for you. I remember there was a gentleman who had some connection with the Free Church College while I was there. He was an American student doing a PhD and he said his own parents were very influenced by his preaching of the prosperity gospel.

[2 : 36] As a consequence they didn't have any insurance, any health insurance, because they'd been taught that God would care for them. Nothing would happen to them. They were involved in a car accident.

They had huge medical bills and it caused them great difficulty in their faith. Why God should allow that to happen? So that's just to remind us now. But this is the case that in some places that is the teaching that people receive. Believe in Jesus Christ, you'll be saved for eternity, and everything in this world will go smoothly. However that teaching does not fit with a teaching of scripture and God's words. It does not fit either with its teaching or with the examples that scripture gives us of New Testament saints and Old Testament saints. Our Lord's Francis seeks to cause, as we heard this morning, that disciples are called to deny themselves, to lose their lives, to be ready to accept trouble. He said he came to bring a sword in families, not peace. He was going to bring trouble as a consequence of the gospel. And then, as I say in the Old Testament and New Testament, those who believed in Christ, they didn't have trouble, see, trouble free lives. Now as in the case of that couple I mentioned, that's not the experience of God's people. Those who are Christians find that they do not have the trouble free life. And that was certainly the case with this woman we're reading right here in this passage, this Huenamite whose son was raised to life by Elisha. She had obeyed God, she had obeyed what Elisha had said, she's gone off out of Israel, off to the land of the Philistines for seven years. She'd come back and she found that her home and her land had been taken over by other people. She couldn't come back to her home.

She had done what she had been told and yet trouble had come into her life. Although God has never promised his people an easy life or a bed of roses, so to speak, he does assure them, he does assure you and me that as we obey, as we trust in him, the final outcome will be for our blessing.

That however difficult circumstances may be at present, we will use these things to do us good, to do us spiritual good, to bring us on in our Christ-likeness, to bring us to greater maturity in our faith. And that was the case in this narrative here. This woman, she faced difficulty, she faced hardship, but the end result was actually greater blessing than if she'd never had the trouble in the first place.

[5 : 26] Before we have a look at this passage, we need to say a word or two about the context of it. Perhaps you'd have been a little surprised to see Gehazi's name mentioned there. He'd sort of left Gehazi behind after he received the name of his leprosy because of his lying and his deceits.

And then here he is reappearing speaking to the king. It's probably best if this passage is understood not to be in chronological order. It doesn't come immediately after the passage we read. Well, we were thinking of last week about the relief of Samaria. Rather, it should go back into chapter 4, verse 38 there.

4, verse 38. There's a mention of a famine. Melissa came again to Gilgal and there was dirt. There was famine in the land. But it's not altogether clear why this passage is here, apparently out of place.

Whatever the reason, the Lord must have some purpose in it. It's best to understand back and before the previous events in the previous chapters. Back before Naaman was relieved of his leprosy and Gehazi was punished with it.

[6 : 47] So, well, having put it in context then, let's have a look at this passage. I think the first thing we get struck by is God's command.

God's command there in verse 1, The Lord was going to send a famine on the land.

And a very serious one of that. It was going to be seven years. Twice the length of the famine that came in Elijah's time. When Elijah afraid that there would be no rain. We're very familiar with that famine.

The little of this one. But this was going to be twice as long. And no doubt, as with Elijah, it was a consequence of Israel's sin. They were still an idolatrous nation.

They still had not gone back to worshipping Jehovah. It was designed then by God as a chastisement, a discipline, to bring them back to true faith in their true gods.

[7 : 57] It also appears to have been very localized. It seems to have been very much the land of Israel and not round the base. The woman here then, she goes off to the land of the Philistines.

The Philistines lived in the strip between Judah and the Mediterranean. Not very far away from Israel at all. Indeed it had a border with Israel. So God in his providence, in his power, had made this a very localized famine.

Seven years. Israel had poor crops, little food. But then the countries round about seemed to have not been affected in this way. There the woman seemed to have been provided for.

For she had all she needed. Now this command for the woman to get up and to leave, not a very easy one for her to obey.

There's no mention of her husband. If you remember back in chapter 4, where we were first introduced to this woman, her husband is described as an old man.

[9 : 00] She had many children and her husband was an old man. It seemed very likely then that at this point her husband had died. She was a widow.

The command from Elisha is addressed to the woman. Now, no mention of her husband. It would seem strange that the command should come to her if her husband was still alive and headed the home.

So it's very likely that she was by herself now with her son and her household. She was going to a country she didn't know. She didn't have the protection and the companionship and the advance of her husband.

She was being told simply to get up and go with her son and her household. If you remember back in chapter 4, she was a wealthy woman. She probably handed a number of servants and the mention of her household suggested that they were to go too.

Her whole company, so to speak, was to leave Israel. But to her credit, she obeys. In faith, she didn't know where she was going. In faith, she does want God's sense and she leaves the land.

[10 : 14] There must have been difficult circumstances for her to be in.

Leaving her own land, going off to the Philistine nation, which of course had long been at war with Israel, going to hostile territory. She didn't know what lay ahead of her.

But God had said it, therefore she obeyed. Perhaps there are questions arising in your mind when you consider this incident and compare it with the book of Ruth, which we have been considering at the prayer meeting.

Elimelech and Naomi, in a similar situation, faced with famine, they get up, leave Israel and go off to Moab. But it would appear that God's judgment was on Elimelech for having done that.

He died there. His sons died. And Naomi returned later on in great poverty. What Elimelech had done appeared to be a great lack of faith.

[11 : 24] He didn't believe that the Lord could provide for him in Israel, so he'd gone off to Moab. But in this case, the Lord is actually commanding the woman to leave Israel and to go elsewhere. Why then did God deal with these people differently?

Why was it right for the Shunammite to leave, but wrong for Elimelech to leave? Well, we have to say that God is sovereign, and God is free to deal with his people as he pleases.

He deals with us as individuals. Simply because he deals with you in one particular way, doesn't mean that he's duty-bound to deal with someone else in a similar situation in precisely the same way.

God knows what is best for you and for me in the situations we face. He knew what was best for this woman. He knew what was right and good for Elimelech in his situation.

The Elimelech should have known from the scriptures that he had that Israel was the land that God had given. And God had promised to provide for his people there if they obeyed.

[12 : 32] This woman would have had a direct command from God to leave. It would have been faithless for her to say, well, I can't go. I don't know what lies beyond me.

I don't know how I can be looked after in the land of the Philistines. It was her faith that motivated him to obey, to go into the land of the Philistines.

God then deals with individuals in individual ways. He is free to deal with you when and as he pleases. We can see that in the way that, if you are tonight a believer, in the way he brought you to believe in Christ.

Perhaps some of you can think of a day when you were converted. That you can put your finger on and say, on that day I became a Christian. There are others who simply grow up into the faith.

I know my own sisters. They say that they can never trace a day when they were not a Christian.

They always believed what they hurt. God deals with individuals in different ways. Perhaps you felt a very deep conviction of sin.

[13 : 42] Others, they don't feel that so much, but rather they see the beauty of Christ. And they want the loveliness of the Christian life. That is what first attracts them.

And perhaps conviction for sin comes later. There are those who have the full and strong assurance of their faith as soon as they are converted. Others, that takes a long time before it develops.

God deals with different people in different ways. And so he dealt with this woman in a different way from Elimelech. He could very well have left her in Israel and provided for her there.

But in his wisdom, God told her to leave the land and to go elsewhere. Perhaps the question arises, Is God to speak to people as he did to this woman today?

A very specific command to this woman through the prophet to get up and to go. He was, I'm sure, all like God to behave like this to us.

[14 : 56] When we are faced with major decisions. Do I go there or do I go here? Do I do this thing or that thing? It would be a great help to us if God would give us a specific command as he did to this woman.

But we have to remember the context of this incident. It was in Old Testament days when there was very little of the written words. Words. God spoke directly through prophets.

And as they spoke, their words were recorded for future generations, for the rest of the church. But now, you and I have all that God is going to say. There is nothing that God needs to say that isn't said already in his works.

Everything in the works, everything in scripture is sufficient to guide you and to guide me through life in this world. Therefore, we do not need prophets.

We do not need God to speak to us directly. Either through dreams or perhaps voices or other means. Everything we need is here.

[16 : 06] The spirit is able to apply what we read to our own situation. I am not saying that God does not speak to us. God does speak to us through his words.

He can speak very powerfully through his words. But he does not speak in the way that he used to in Old Testament times. I know of people who have said that the Lord told them to go here or to go there.

And I hesitate to be sceptical of other people's experience. But I really do not see how that can fit with what we have in scripture.

God has said all that he needs to say. And he has sufficient there to guide us in our lives. If we are seeking God's guidance in any particular matter, we shouldn't then be expecting some sort of

extraordinary experience.

Rather, the Holy Spirit applies the Bible. He takes what's written here. It may be a particular verse. It may be one or two words even. Or it may be a general principle of his works.

[17 : 14] He takes that and he applies it to our own situation. There may also be providential things, so to speak.

Doors closing. We use that analogy. Doors opening, doors closing. Something that's one way you can go. Another way is quite impossible for you to go anymore. And then there's the advice of other Christian people and their direction.

The Spirit uses all these things to direct his people how they should live, the decisions they should take. We can't expect God to speak as he did to this woman through a prophet.

It is not, in one sense, it's not as direct. God doesn't address his people as directly as he did through Elisha here.

But in another sense, it is just as direct. When God speaks to you, when God speaks to my heart, you and I, we know very well from whom that is coming. We know in our own experience the force with which God's word can come.

[18 : 21] So then, that was God's command for the woman. A command to leave the land and to go elsewhere. It was a difficult command for the woman. But she obeys her trust in the Lord and evidence.

She obeys and she goes to the land of the Philistines. But then, next we see God's timing. In verses 4 and 5 there. And the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.

And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land.

And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. Seven years have passed.

The woman stayed in the land of the Philistines at that time. No doubt at the end of seven years she was very keen to get back to her own lands. It's not explicitly stated here, but it would appear that their drawing of the turning had turned very sour.

[19 : 35] Because they came to find that her land and her home, her house, had been taken over by someone else. Some opportunist, during the time she was away, had taken up residence in her own home.

Perhaps it was neighbours, perhaps it might have been the king himself, the state, taking over her home. People, we might say, it's not surprising, during a famine.

People would want to make what you secrete of the land to get what little was produced by us during that time. But it must have been a great shock to her, having obeyed the Lord, gone off to the land, coming back and finding she got nowhere to go because others had taken over her property. She was, as we suggested, more than likely a widow at this point. A widow with her orphan son. And of course she would have had very little influence in the society at the time.

It would seem, therefore, it would have been very unlikely that this woman should have her land restored to her. It must have been very hard to take that.

[20 : 52] To come back and find that she had lost all that she had. It had come about because of her obedience. She might very well have been tempted to think, Oh well, if only I hadn't done what I was told.

And at least I would have a roof over my head. But in her trouble, she goes to the king. This was probably King Jehoram. And going on Jehoram's character, perhaps she didn't have a lot of hope that he would listen to her case.

But anyway, she goes. And it is then that we see God's perfect timing. God's precise timing in these events. A king, for some reason, he'd been talking to Gehazi, and he wanted Gehazi to relate about the miracles that Elisha had been performing, the great things that Elisha had done.

And Gehazi is just at that moment talking about this woman whose son was raised alive. And why he's talking about her? There she is. She appears at the door. She's seeking an audience for the king.

Perhaps you can imagine Gehazi's astonishment. There she is. I was talking about this woman. And then, here she is. That's the one I'm speaking about. That brings to mind, my father-in-law,

when he was over, he was saying, he and the, he was in the war, going through the Suez Canal. [22 : 17] And one of the other sailors he was talking to, and he was a fellow, he said his brother was in the army. He had no idea in the world where he was. And as he was talking about him, he just happened to look up, and there his brother was walking on the side of the canal.

And a tremendous astonishment that man had to see his own brother. He could have been anywhere else in the world. Well, that's the sort of impact this must have made on Gehazi. The one woman he was talking about, and all of a sudden, there she is in the king's presence. God's perfect timing in arranging all these events to work so wonderfully together. What was the effect of her arrival there?

Well, as we see in verse 6, the king asked the woman, and she told him, she was able to confirm to the king precisely what Gehazi was saying. I think in our own society, people are very sceptical when you hear about raising the debts in Scripture.

No doubt the king might have been much the same. While death is regarded as the end, people don't come back from the debts. But the very fact of this woman appearing with her son must have reinforced what Gehazi was saying.

[23 : 37] must have banished any scepticism the king might have had. Here before him, in the flesh, so to speak, was living proof of what Gehazi was saying of the great things that God had done through Elisha.

He had, the king had to believe his own eyes. And her arrival, at that point, seems to have made him willing to grant the woman's request.

It's tempting to consider, to wonder, what the king might have done, or might not have done, if she hadn't appeared at this point.

If she hadn't, he'd never been talking to Gehazi. And this woman just appeared out in blue, asking for her property back. The king may have had no time for her. You can think of, perhaps, the parable of the unjust judge that our Lord tells in the New Testament.

A woman who keeps going to the judge, and the judge just hasn't had time for her. Perhaps King Jehoram would have been much like that, had it not been for God's timing in arranging, his providential arranging, of this meeting.

[24 : 48] Clearly then, God was in control of every detail of this incident. He was in control, bringing the woman into the court at that point.

He was in control of the king's thoughts. The king had wanted to hear from Gehazi what Elisha had done. The Lord was in control of what Gehazi was saying.

So all these things worked together, and the woman came in at precisely the right time. And of course, God is still just as much in control of the events of this world.

All the events of your life are timed by God to perfection. We don't see it in the same way as in this incident, but it does not renew the fact that every event in your life has been ordered by God for the purposes of his glory and for the good of his church.

And if we are the Lord's people, it is for your good, it is for your blessing, the way he has ordered your life. There may be many occasions, but it certainly doesn't seem that way.

[26 : 00] We would wish things to be very different. We would wish things to happen at a different time in a different order. Like this woman, we may be facing trying circumstances.

We might wish that they would change immediately, that God wouldn't intervene now and answer our prayers immediately. But God has his timing.

God has his purposes. You may well wonder why God delays. But God is a sovereign and he knows what he is doing. And that's something we've been praying about for years, for months, months, years.

I'm wondering why God doesn't God answer that prayer now. Again, we have to say God's timing is perfect. He is going to answer that prayer. Or this incident can be just simply an encouragement to us to know that God is in control.

That however haphazard the events of life may be, even in our own lives or in the events of the whole world, they're not chaos at all. Every detail of the history of this world has been planned by God.

[27 : 13] It is in his purposes. It is precisely according to his timing. The events in your life and my life, they do have purpose.

They are part of God's overall plan for the glory of Jesus Christ and for the bringing in of his kingdom. He has a purpose to do good to his people, to make his people Christ-like, to make them ready for glory.

So our Lord's timing, God's timing, is very clearly evident in this passage. But then finally we see God's provision. In the second half of verse 6 there, So the king appointed unto her a certain officer saying, Restore all that was heard on all the fruit of the field since the day that she left the land even until now.

As a consequence of her interview with the king, as a consequence of her coming in just at that moment, the king agrees to do what she asks and he appoints an official to look after her case. The official was to make sure that she got back all that was hers, to receive her house, to receive her land, but there was more. She was also to receive the fruits of all of her field in the time that she's been away.

[28 : 38] That probably doesn't refer literally to the fruits, to the things that had grown there, but to the revenue, the income that had come from her field. What had grown had probably been used up, had been eaten by now, but what had come from her field was to be given to her.

The income, the revenue it had produced. She ended up with more than she'd expected. She'd expected to come back to her home, to her land, and that would be it.

But instead of that, she gets her home, her land, and the income from all the seven years that have passed. Do you see God's provision in that?

Looking after this woman, as a consequence of her obedience, things looked black because she had obeyed. But as it turned out in the end, she received God's blessing because of what she had done.

Her obedience didn't involve her losing out in the end. But rather, she gained blessing. She received more good than she'd expected. Further provision from God because she had done what the Lord had instructed her to do.

[29 : 49] that was God's way. That was God's way. Initially, it was hard. Initially, it must have been very difficult for her to come to terms with the fact that she'd lost her home.

But it results, in the end, in greater blessing for the moment, in greater provision for her. we see here something of God's special concern for the widow and the orphan.

We sang about it there in Psalm 146. The widow's shield, the stranger's shield, the widow's stay, the orphan's help is he.

And that's a special concern for the widow and the orphan comes through in Scripture in many places. You notice the same in the book of Ruth.

Also, elsewhere in Scripture, in the prophets, there's condemnation on those who didn't provide for the widow and the orphan. There's blessing on those who didn't.

[30 : 50] There's special laws in Deuteronomy regarding gleaning and such like to make sure that the widow and the orphan were provided for. Moving on into the New Testament, the New Testament church was particularly concerned in providing for the widows, for believing widows.

We read in James chapter 1 there that pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the afflicted and widows in their affliction.

In Israel, widows and orphans would have been the most vulnerable most insecure, most impoverished sector of society. No one to provide for them, no one to care for them, no one to protect them.

And so it is those people who most need God's care and protection who have a special place in our Lord's heart, so to speak. Those who are the weakest and the poorest and the most needy.

Those are the ones who have got special protection in the works. As Christ provided for the Shunammite here, this widow, surely the church of God, those who are his people, those who are like Christ, they must have the same concern as their father has.

[32 : 13] If God has a concern for the neediest people in society, then we ourselves must have that same concern for those in their needs. Is there someone known to you, perhaps, someone known to me, who has particular needs that are not supplied by the state or by neighbours or friends or family?

Do we have opportunities to show something of the love of Christ, the love of God for the needy in our own circumstances? That's what this passage is teaching, that God has a special concern for those who are of greatest need and have least support from society in general.

That was the case with this widow, and the Lord provided marvelously for her. But then there's a second application we see in the Lord's provision for this woman, in that the Lord will bless obedience in his people.

If you obey the Lord, you can expect God's blessing and that he will do you good. This was no ordinary widow.

She was a believing widow. She was a woman who had her faith in God. She had a living relationship with God. She obeyed in faith. And so, God has committed himself to all such people.

[33 : 40] To you and to me, we have the same relationship that she had, a living relationship with God through Christ. We read this morning in Matthew chapter 9, how our Lord compared, he spoke of how important sparrows were.

Not one sparrow falls to the ground without our father knowing it. And you're worth far more than that. You're worth far more sparrows. You read in Matthew 6 about the Lord saying, take no thought what you'll eat, what you'll wear, where you'll live.

Consider the rest of creation. Your father looks after all that. Don't be worried about these things. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

if we are in Christ tonight, if we are his believing people, we can be absolutely confident of his provision for you. You need to have no worries about the future.

That's what was the case with this woman. As she obeyed, as she lived this life of faith in God, she had no worries. She need to have no worries, God would provide for her and he did provide for her.

[34 : 57] If God in his grace and his mercy has given us his son, if he has given you, Jesus Christ, his own son, that you might have life, if he has done that for you, surely you need have no worry about the little details of life, food or drink or friendship or work or whatever it may be.

These things are nothing to God compared to giving his own son. Christ will provide for his people. Whether it's our financial needs, you don't need to worry about it, God will provide.

Whether it's strength for the duties that come to us, strength to deal with problems and trials that come our way, strength to deal with the pressures and sorrows that we live in in this world.

Whatever our need is, our Lord promises to provide for us. And as in the case of the Shunemites, often the Lord gives us more than we expect.

The woman expected to come back to her property, but the Lord gave her more of property and this revenue from her fields. Thinking back to Ruth, again, you see the same there.

[36 : 17] Ruth, she was provided not only with her husband and family, but she was provided with a place in the genealogy of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

A tremendous honour for that Moabitess. God gave her far more than she expected, far more than she asked for. This God who cared for the Shunemite woman, who provided for her, he is precisely the same today.

he cares for you and for me in precisely the same way. He will provide your every needs in Christ. He has all the resources of the universe at his disposal.

Nothing is too hard for him to provide for you. You need have no cares, no worries in this world. You can trust him implicitly. You can be absolutely certain of his love, wisdom, and of his care.

There are times, of course, when we do not understand why God has allowed certain things to happen. The woman must have asked that herself. Why has this happened? I've lost my home. But in the end of the day, he saw a great purpose in us.

[37 : 36] That is often the case in our lives. It's only after we've been through times of trouble and we can look back in retrospect and say, well, wasn't God good to us? He's done us so much good in bringing us through that time of trial.

That may not be always the case. We don't always understand why God allows difficulty and trials in our lives. But the sort of faith that this woman had will never be disappointed.

If we trust God, we can be absolutely certain that our confidence is not misplaced. if you have that sort of faith, then let that faith be strengthened by the example of this woman.

And if you do not have that faith, well, come to Christ, trust Him implicitly, with your whole eternity. He is worthy of all the trust that you can give Him.

Amen. Let us pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. What a wonderful and gracious and caring God you are, Lord.

[38 : 48] We do not deserve any of the good things you give us because we are so rebellious, we so often delight in doing what is wrong, because we give so little of our lives to you and to your

cause.

Yet you are a gracious and forgiving God. and every one of us who know you tonight can testify to that how marvelously good you are to us, how you provide for us day by day, how your word is absolutely trustworthy, that all that you have said has been fulfilled, and we have great confidence that all you have said regarding the future and the future life in glory, all that is trustworthy and true as well.

thank you for giving us this record of this incident in the Shunammites life. May it be an encouragement to us, may it strengthen our faith as we face different circumstances and difficulties and may it be an encouragement to any who as yet have not put their faith in Jesus Christ.

We commit these things into your care and ask that you do us good and bring us blessing through the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.