

A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE AS TOLD BY The Woman of Shunem  
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THE WOMAN OF SHUNEM

My name is of little consequence: it is sufficient to say I was born on a farm in the land of Shunem, and because my parents were moderately wealthy, I enjoyed privileges denied to most of the children who lived in our area. My father and mother were God-fearing people who taught me to respect and serve Jehovah. Naturally, as I grew older, I experienced all the longings familiar to other young ladies, and I secretly prayed that I would find a man so that together we could enjoy our own family. Eventually I met the one who was destined to become my husband, and the fulfillment of my dreams seemed to come a little closer. He was a farmer and acquainted with everything associated with agriculture. When my parents died, I inherited the property, and life took on a new meaning for both of us. I believed in God but apparently something was lacking in my faith. I might say that my beliefs were intellectual: they were in my mind but not in my soul. Now as I look back over the years, four words seem to sum up my experiences. They are: gratitude, grief, guidance, and gladness.

Perhaps, if I deal with them one at a time and in that order, you will better understand what happened to me.

#### Gratitude

We were well known in our district, and some of the people referred to me as The Great Woman of Shunem (2 Kings 4:8), but whether or not that definition was earned remains debatable. Perhaps they were referring to my property, which, as I have said, was considerable: however, material possessions, though desirable, cannot satisfy the deepest longings of a woman's soul. My husband and I prayed earnestly that God would favor us with a child, but as the years passed by, it seemed as if our prayers would not be answered. We were extremely disappointed, and slowly our faith began to wane.

And then one day I saw a stranger walking along the dusty road near to our farm. This was unusual, for our neighbors spent most of their time working in the fields. This man of distinction had a servant who appeared to be very respectful. Yet the man himself was different. At first I did not take much notice, but when he continued at intervals to return, I began to wonder why

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he was coming and what was his mission. I remember saying to my husband: "Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber. I pray thee, on the wall: and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither" (2 Kings 4:9-10). We were both captivated and looked forward eagerly to his arrival. Our house soon became a rest-home on the highway. We discovered he was a prophet called Elisha. He often spoke about his former master, Elijah, who had recently gone home to heaven. When in the evening he spoke to us, my husband and I were fascinated for he told amazing stories. We were filled with regret when he ceased. We could have listened to him forever.

Then came the morning when I had the shock of my life. Gehazi, the prophet's servant, told me his master wished to see me. Rather nervously I went to stand in the doorway of his room. He looked at me and said: "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." I was completely astonished and could only whisper. "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid." Afterward I seemed to be walking on

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air: the impossible was happening, and as the months passed, my body told me that I was not dreaming. Perhaps it was at that time the God of my intellect became the Lord of my heart. Often in the great crises of life, this happens to people. Perhaps it will not seem amiss if I ask my listeners if this ever happened to them.

Grief

The years began to pass, my baby became an attractive boy and was the joy of my life. I had to be his mother, teacher, friend, and guide, but every day was a little bit of heaven on earth. God had been gracious to me, and my child seemed to be a small angel sent down to dispel my loneliness. At harvest time he loved to accompany his father into the fields, and the servants loved him as he tried to emulate their example. No music could compare with my boy's laughter. Little did I know when one morning I packed his lunch, that the day was to be the darkest of my life. Storm clouds were about to eclipse the sun! Out in the fields my son was trying to help the men when, placing his hands to his head, he cried, "My head, my head." My husband, who did not realize the seriousness of the situation, said to a lad, "Carry him to his mother." When I

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saw the fellow carrying the limp form in his arms, my heart stood still. I hardly knew what I was doing, but somehow I carried my son up to the prophet's chamber and laid him on the bed. Then I went out and shut the door. I continued to ask myself, "Why did God give him to me if He intended to take him so soon?" I had no answer, but nothing else mattered at that moment. I had needed God in life: I needed Him much more in death. Now as I remember that terrible moment. It seems as an awful nightmare. I sought and found Elisha, and eventually he arrived at my home, and I watched as he ascended the stairs to his chamber. I did not know all that took place until I was informed later by the servant. I heard the prophet's footsteps as he walked to and fro, and realized that even he was fighting a great battle, that his soul was also filled with anguish. Then suddenly I heard my child sneezing, as if he were catching a cold,

I did not fully comprehend all that was taking place, but when the door opened, I saw the servant smiling. He invited me to enter the chamber, and when I did, I saw the prophet standing alongside the bed, He said, "Take up thy son." I could hardly move, My feet seemed fastened to the floor, but there stood my boy as if he had just awakened from sleep. I wanted to rush over and hug him, but something prevented me. The prophet was gravely watching. Perhaps he was wondering what my reactions would be. Instinctively, I went over and fell at his feet to whisper, "Thank you." Then I took up my boy and went down to my kitchen. Tears were streaming down my face as I hugged him. I wonder now if Jehovah was smiling. What might have happened had I neglected to go to the prophet?

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire:  
Uttered or unexpressed;  
The motion of a hidden fire,  
That trembles in the breast.

Guidance

I smile now when I read the account supplied by the ancient writer.

Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying Arise, and go thou and thine household, and

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sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath  
called for a famine: and it shall also come upon the land  
seven years (2 Kings 8:1).

I cannot help but wonder if people ever realize what happened on that fateful morning when I saw Elisha approaching my home. I had not forgotten the miracle that restored my son to me, but this special visit from the prophet was unexpected. After my husband's death, my son and I, with the help of God, had continued to farm the land and were content. When Elisha commanded me to leave my property and hurry to an unknown destination, I was dumbfounded. We had worked so hard to maintain the farm, and to leave everything at a moment's notice seemed unreasonable. But I already knew that Elisha was a man of God who was the messenger of the Almighty. He urged us to hurry as there was no time to lose. I quickly gathered things essential for the journey, sold what equipment was possible, and with any money I could obtain, sadly left our property. This was not easy for that farm was the dearest place on earth. Where could we go? What could be done when we arrived? What would happen to my son if I died in a strange land? What would your reactions be if you were placed in a similar position?

When we arrived in the land of the Philistines, we made a few inquiries and eventually settled in a small village. At first everything appeared to be bewildering, but fortunately we had sufficient funds to meet our daily needs. I do not think my son understood all that was happening, but I was determined he would never forget his homeland. Each night I told him stories about our native land, but after he went to sleep, I sat and sometimes wept. What had happened to my farm? Were other people living there and working the land? Had we already been forgotten? Yes, I knew God had brought us to this foreign land, but would He ever take us home again?

That first year was terrible: the next was almost as bad, but after that, my grief was not so intense. When I saw my new neighbors reaping their harvest, my heart missed a beat, and my memories became intensely active. I wondered if Jehovah had forgotten me. That was an awful feeling. My sisters, did you ever have a similar experience? As darkness enveloped my soul, I began to wonder if the sun would ever shine again. The psalmist

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asked himself: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" but then he said: "Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him" (Ps. 42:5).

Yes, I am truly traveling down memory's lane when I recall that after seven years, I heard God whispering: "It's time to go home."

And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land (2 Kings 8:3).

The day had arrived, and I did not care what danger lay ahead. I had learned that a crust of bread in my homeland was better than a banquet in a foreign land. My boy and I had to travel over a hundred miles to reach our country, and the journey was not an easy one. Most of our money had been spent, and our financial security was at an all-time low. We were at the end of our resources and completely dependent upon the Lord. It was impossible for us to know that each step was counted by God, and He controlled everything. We did not know then that our arrival had already been arranged. We could neither arrive late, nor early. Our problem was only a part of a

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jigsaw puzzle which the Almighty was patiently putting together. As we reviewed the entire episode, we became convinced God is too wise to make a mistake, and too loving to be unkind. Jehovah was calmly calculating every phase of our long journey.

When we entered our homeland, what would be the best thing to do? To proceed to our former home would be unwise, for other people would be living there. To go elsewhere would be impossible, for we had little if any money to buy or rent a new home. To appeal to a local magistrate would be useless: people who left Israel to live among Philistines would never be popular and certainly not compensated for losses. I soon realized that an appeal to the king was my only hope of securing assistance. Perhaps when I decided to approach the ruler, God smiled. Life teaches how the just shall live by faith: men and women must proceed even when the road ahead seems uninviting. There is always help just around the corner.

#### Gladness

I was surprised when I saw the king seated in the open air and speaking loudly to a beggar who was standing a small distance away. I wondered if it would be wise to interrupt the proceedings. For oftentimes kings have ruthless ways of dealing with offenders. I was unaware of events which had taken place during my stay in Philistia: I did not know that the servant of Elisha had become a leper and had been banished to a place of isolation. Neither did I know that the king, who was not known for piety, had developed a keen interest in the exploits of a prophet who had formerly been despised. For some inexplicable reason, the monarch desired to know more about Elisha, and when he heard Gehazi could provide information, he threw caution to the winds and summoned the doomed man into his presence.

He asked the leper if he could supply what he needed to hear, and receiving an affirmative reply, commanded the fellow to tell a story about his former master. When my son and I arrived, the man was actually telling the king about us, and to say the least, I was astonished. There were many amazing stories which could be told about Elisha, but for some inscrutable reason, on the spur of the moment, the informant began to describe how Elisha restored life to my boy. I thought this was an opportune moment and cried: "O King, please help me." Surprised, the monarch turned his head to look at me; the leper ceased speaking; there was a moment of silence, and then the leper shouted: "My Lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life" (2 Kings 8:5). For a few moments everyone appeared to be confused, The king was trying to understand the situation, the leper was staring at me and the boy, and the silence was deafening! Then the king asked if the story was true and where I had been, etc.

When I had told the story how God had commanded me to leave the land so that the approaching famine would not deprive us of sustenance, the king said to an officer: "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruit of the field, since the day that she left the land, even until now." As I listened I did not know whether to laugh or cry. Probably the tenant to be evicted was also compensated, but there could never be a happier day than that we experienced when once again we walked around our newly acquired property. It is still difficult to believe that God paid for

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our seven-year vacation in a foreign land. He surely knew how to honor His word and care for His dependents. I have truly escorted you down my memory lane, and in so doing have en-

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riched my soul, What can I say in conclusion? Perhaps David  
says it best:

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the  
righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

My journey into the past seems to proclaim a great truth: It  
pays to trust in the living God.

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