

EVERY WOMAN IN THE BIBLE

THE SHUNAMITTE: (2 Kings 4:8-37 & (8:1-6).

She offers the hospitality of her home to the prophet Elisha. Turns over the upper room to him. He tells her she will have a son in "due time". The son, at about 12 years old, became very ill, while working in field with father, was rushed to his mother. He dies in her arms. She tells no one, but goes to Elisha for help. He returns with her and raises the boy from the dead. Later during a famine, Elisha urges her to take the boy and go to Phoenicia. She goes there and stays there 7 years. Upon her return, the King Jehoram restores her home and lands to her and the boy, after it had been seized during their absence.

A GREAT WOMAN.

In the NIV version of the Bible the Shunammite woman is called well-to-do. This undoubtedly means she was a wealthy and an influential woman, but her story shows that she was great in other ways too – in her faith, wisdom, and her silence. Because she lived in Shunem, a village on the edge of the rich grain fields of Esdraelon, she has come to be known as the Shunammite.

History has been made on the site of her home. Here she walked daily on the place where King Saul, and his son Jonathan were killed in battle. The soldiers of Israel had also won many battles against the Philistines here. Elijah the prophet often was seen to have passed on this road in front of her home often. The road lead from Nazareth across the Plain of Esdraelon to Jerusalem. She probably had heard of Elisha because of Elijah's act of passing on his mantle. She, as well as many of the people around her, had heard that Elisha was also a man of God, and had done many miracles, including increasing the oil in the jars and vessels of the widow of one of the prophets, resulting in her ability to pay her debts.

This and other miracles she had heard caused her to wonder about Elisha. The Shunammite woman was very receptive to God's word.

She said to her husband, (2 Kings 4:9-10) "Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

Little is said of her husband. We do know from 2 Kings 4:14, that she had no children, and her husband was "old".

It is evident she was a woman with property, a leader in her community, and one who extended her hands to help the rich and poor people alike.

Then, one day when Elisha was indeed in the room they prepared for him, he was trying to think of what he could do for the Shunammite. He called his servant Gehazi to call the Shunammite. So, he called her. and she stood before him. He asked Gehazi what he could do for her? Did she need for him to speak to the King or the commander of the army? She said simply, she had her home and her people. She was saying that she was content, she had found her place, and was reconciled to her situation. So, he asked Gehazi what he thought he should do

for her. Gehazi stated the obvious; that her husband was old, and she had no son.

So he called her again, and she stood in the doorway, he said; "about this time next year you will have a son."

She had a hard time believing it, as she had wished for a son for a long while. She said, "Oh No, my lord", don't mislead your servant, O Man Of God!" This reaction seems strange at first until we link it to her first statement. It wasn't that she didn't want a son, but she was determined to be satisfied with what life had provided. She feared she would make herself miserable if she hoped for what she thought she could not have. For those who have tried to insulate themselves from hurt by determining not to dream, the sudden introduction of hope can be frightening. But the prophecy did come true and the woman had a son, that next spring. It is not hard to imagine the strong affection this mother felt for the son who came through a blessing from a great prophet. Common sense says it also increased her love of God.

Several years passed, maybe 10 or 12. The Bible gives us no record other than that one day the boy went out among the reapers with his father. It was the harvest season, the whole valley around the village was in intense heat. Even the sand was parched, and stung on the bare feet.

The son was out there not too long when he complained to his father: "My head, my head"! The father turned to his servant and said, "carry him to his mother".

His mother held him on her lap, but he grew worse and died; possibly from sun stroke in that heat. Though confronted with her only son's death, her faith in God was supreme.

She carried her son quickly up the outside stairs, entered the prophets chamber, and placed her dead son on his bed. No murmur of complaint, no loud wailing escaped from her. She did not even call loudly to her husband, but kept quiet until she could go to Elisha.

She probably remembered the story of how Elijah had raised the dead son of the Widow of Zarephath. The Shunammite believed her lifeless son could also be the center of such a miracle. She trusted so much in the healing power of God, that she never once said, "my son is dead".

She called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.

"Why go to him today? He asked. "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath."

"It's all right" she said.

She saddled her donkey and said to her servant, "lead on; hurry; don't slow down for me unless I tell you to."

So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When Elisha saw her, he sent his servant Gehazi out to meet her and ask "Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?"

Everything "is alright" she said. And she rushed to touch Elisha's feet. Gehazi was having "none of that" and tried to protect Elisha. Elisha sensed that the woman needed him, and said "Leave her alone!" She is in distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why." (2 Kings 4:27).

"Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you 'Don't raise my hopes'? (2 Kings

4:28).

Hurriedly ordering Gehazi to take his staff and go to the child, Elisha understood the seriousness of the situation, especially when the Shunammite further implored, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you, (2 Kings 4:30) so he got up and followed her. Gehazi hurried on ahead with Elisha's staff and placed it upon the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. When Elisha, traveling more slowly, finally came to the child, he went into the room alone, shut the door, prayed solemnly to God Like Elijah, who had stretched himself upon the child of the widow of Zarephath, Elisha, too, stretched himself upon the child until his flesh was warm. When the child sneezed 7 times and opened his eyes Elisha summoned Gehazi.

Elisha got up and told Gehazi to "call the Shunammite", which he did. Seeing her child breathing; he smiled, and stretched out his arms to her once more, the Shunammite fell at Elisha's feet, powerless, speechless, and conscious only that her child lived again. The prophet, who had lived in a spirit of victory, had given her a wonderful demonstration of a spiritual victory. Later, when famine was spreading in the direction of the rich grain country of Shunem, Elisha warned the Shunammite to leave her home and to go to the land of the Philistines with her son, so as to escape the great desolation of drought. Elisha had come from Samaria only a short time before, and so great was the famine there that some of the people had turned to cannibalism.

Elisha stopped by the house of the Shunammite to warn her and her son of the approaching famine. (There is no record of the father. Probably he had died by this time.) The Shunammite quickly did as Elisha had directed and did not look back upon the comforts she left behind, but pressed on with her son to the land of the Philistines.

Her move is described briefly in (2 Kings 8:1-2). Elisha told her "Now go away with your family and stay for awhile wherever you can, because the LORD has decreed a famine in the land that will last 7 years. The woman took her family and did as Elisha had told her, and stayed in the land of the Philistines.

In the next verse we learn that the Shunammite returned to her home, only to find that her house and land had been confiscated. Again, she kept her silence until she could appear in person before King Jehoram.

At the moment Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored a dead body to life, the Shunammite walked in. This, explained Gehazi, is the woman whose son was raised from the dead.

King Jehoram was duly impressed and said, "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day she left the land until now". (2 Kings 8:6).

From the beginning to this dramatic conclusion, the Shunammite's life is an example of victorious living. Her peculiar charm is her serenity in moments of trial, firmness in affliction, her calm yet energetic prosecution of her son's rights before the king, and her unselfish endurance, and anxiety and anguish. She won every claim to greatness, because at the sudden death of her only son she could go forward and seek the man of God, who she knew could heal her son. And when he asked how it was with the child, she answer, "It is well."

In the gallery of Bible women there is no better example of positive faith. The Shunammite did not allow negative ideas to enter her mind because she had such sublime confidence in the power of God.

The Shunammite had resolved to live a life marked by the rejection of hope until Elisha appeared and gave her hope despite herself. Her hope had borne fruit: she had a son. But now the son was dead, and in her dark despair it seemed preferable to have lived the empty, hopeless life she had known before the boy was conceived than to experience the pain that now tore at her innermost being.

But the woman's story doesn't end there. Elisha's God restored the child to life and to his mother's arms. And the woman learned an important lesson about life.

What was the lesson? Simply that the logic of abandonment is wrong. If I want nothing, I cannot suffer from its lack. If I have nothing I cannot be hurt by its loss." Such a life is stark and empty. God invites us to live in hope and expectation rather than in resignation. While it is true that living in hope may bring us unexpected pain and that every gain brings with it the possibility of loss, the God who guards and guides us is gracious indeed. In opening our lives to whatever the future may bring, whatever pain we know will be more than balanced by joy.

THE SHUNAMITTE: AN EXAMPLE FOR TODAY:

- Non-believers may dismiss the woman's appearance at the exact moment Elisha's former servant was telling the king about her as a coincidence. But we are not to lose sight of the fact that we have a wonderful God who exercises sovereign control. Even now He is weaving many "coincidences" into the fabric of our lives
-
- We seem to have forgotten that hospitality is a spiritual gift. The woman of Shunem practiced this gift and she was greatly blessed because she did.
-

ANYMOUSE