

2 Kings 4:8-37

Aim of lesson

To show how God blesses those who help his servants.

Background study

Look for information about domestic life in Old Testament times. Matthew 10:40-42.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the class that Elijah had gone away and that it was Elisha who now had the task of preaching God's word to the people. He travelled round to meet the people in the towns and villages, visiting each community at regular intervals, concerned for their spiritual welfare. Remind the children too, that travel was usually on foot, along dusty tracks, often under a hot sun. At the end of each day Elisha and his servant would be glad to find comfortable accommodation and to rest their tired limbs. Perhaps they spent some nights out in the open. How welcome, then, would be an offer of hospitality in someone's home.

The woman of Shunem

Convey the character of the woman, her thoughtfulness, her recognition of Elisha's godliness and her awareness of his needs. One gains the impression from the story that this was a quiet, welcoming home. The woman of Shunem was hospitable and contented. She and her husband were also exceedingly generous, for not only did they rearrange their accommodation to suit Elisha, but went to considerable trouble and expense in order to provide him with his own room. In describing the furnishing of the room, explain that the candlestick was not a holder for a wax candle but a stand on which to place an oil lamp (pictures would be useful). Elisha so appreciated all that the woman had done for him that he wanted to give her something to express his gratitude. He was poor and she was wealthy, so he was not able to buy her a gift. Yet his gift to her was greater than anything money could buy.

And she bore a son

No doubt Elisha was glad to witness the happiness that the arrival of the baby brought to this family, and each time he visited during the next few years he would remark upon how much the boy had grown. His friendship with the family grew and he must have looked forward to his visits to their home. In describing the circumstances of the boy's collapse, suggest the possibility of sunstroke. It was because of the fierce heat of the sun's rays that the Israelites wore a cloth to cover the head and neck, as many Arabs still do today.

Tragedy and restoration

When tragedy struck, the Shunammite woman immediately thought of Elisha and wasted no time in turning to him for help. Happily she knew where Elisha could be found and rode

hard to fetch him as quickly as possible. Elisha was very surprised to see her approaching, and was immediately concerned about the family's welfare. Clearly something was wrong for her to have made the journey, yet Elisha had received no message from God about it. She would allow nothing to deter her from securing Elisha's personal intervention, knowing that he was the one endowed with the power of God. This power was granted to him by God, in response to his prayer. It is interesting that, in this case, the miracle of restoring life was not immediate, in response to a word of command; only after Elisha's persistent efforts to revive the child was life restored. The relief and joy not only of the parents, but of Elisha and Gehazi too, can be imagined, and many prayers of thankfulness would have been offered to God that day. Possibly, during further visits, Elisha and his servant were able to see the boy grow to manhood.

Relevance to the children's lives

Do you sometimes have visitors at your house? What can you do to make them feel welcome? 'Hospitality' means making people welcome, and this creates happiness for those who receive it and those who give it, and strengthens friendships.

Worksheets

The code reads: 'Elisha was a holy man of God who raised the son of the Shunammite woman because she had always been very kind to him and often given him a bed for the night'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for everything you have given us. Help us to be kind and generous to others, and to share with them the things we have. Amen.

Memory verse

"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way" (2 Corinthians 9:11).