

Knock on Effect

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Date: 20 November 2016

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[0 : 0 0] we can turn back to that portion that we read in the second book of kings and chapter four second kings chapter four and again depending on the lord to help us would like to think about the words that we find in verse 40. Second kings chapter four verse 40 then we saved it to the men to eat and it happened as they were eating the stew that they cried out and said man of god there is death in the pot and they could not eat it there is death in the pot i wonder if you remember a game certainly had it when i was younger called domino rally so you set up loads and loads of dominos in a line sometimes they went around a bend or over a bridge or under something they'd have a lot of patience to set it up then you went to the start of it and you flick the first domino and all the others fell down and you'll watch them fall over one by one but maybe you've seen or maybe you've done this maybe you've seen people set up hundreds or maybe thousands of dominoes standing up and you look at it and it makes no sense and then again the same thing happens they flick the first one and eventually they all fall and when they've fallen you see that it's created a pattern looks like chaos when it's happening all these dominoes falling no idea where it's going to end then when it does end you see the finished product well we can look back in history and we can see a domino effect of events you can see it in the world's history think about what caused the first world war for example you can see it in your own personal history sometimes at different for different reasons and this is what we have here we have a sort of domino effect in the experience of the prophet elisha and the sons of the prophets we're going to try to think about four steps in this domino effect and maybe it seems like there's no sense to what's going on as we look at it but i hope that in the end when the last domino has fallen we see that there's something amazing and important for us to see here the first domino the first step is that there is famine in the land there's famine in the land so here we are in israel and the country is in the grip of famine now from time to time in the bible we read about a bit of famine in israel and in a way that's not unexpected because israel is a hot and dry country and you probably expect there to be famine there from time to time but a famine in israel in the old testament is different to a famine in any other part of the world at any other point in history how what makes these famines in israel in the bible unique well a famine in israel during the old testament times is a sign of god being angry of god punishing people god used it as a means to judge israel in leviticus 26 god is speaking to the children of israel and he talks about the blessings that they'll experience if they obey him but then he flips it

on its head and he tells them about the judgments that they'll suffer if they disobey him and this is one of the things that god says will happen if israel does obeys him your land shall not heal its increase and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit god's making it clear to israel that if they disobey he will use famine he will use a lack of food as a punishment as a judgment on them and then we have a similar sort of thing in deuteronomy 28 where god's talking about blessings and curses and when he's talking about curses he says this if you will not obey the voice of the lord your god then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you now listen to the curses that are listed cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the field in other words it doesn't matter where you are you're going to suffer for this cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl the basket where they would gather their food the kneading bowl where they would prepare the food cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground the increase of your hearth and the young of your flock animals food even children cursed the lord will strike you with wasting disease and with fever inflammation and fiery heat and with drought the lord will make the rain of your land powder from heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed that's a pretty horrific list of things that are being threatened on israel isn't it and wouldn't you think that any country any body of people who heard this would be terrified of the consequences that he tells them are going to happen wouldn't you think that anyone who had this hanging over their heads would do everything possible to obey god and to avoid making them angry but what we see friends is israel time after time after time turning away from god doing their own thing disobeying him ignoring what he's told them and what happens as a result well god sticks to his word and they're punished now it's not clear what exactly israel has done to be under god's judgment at this point in second kings 4 but we can be sure that they've done something that they've turned away from in some way and that it deserves this judgment because god is a fear god and in a way it doesn't really matter what they've done the important thing is that we know they've turned their back on him in some way and as a result they're suffering now it's very easy to see to look at somebody and say well god is punishing that person with whatever's going on in his life god's punishing him for something that he's done or even friend to look at your own life and say well i'm suffering because of the wrong thing that i did but i think that we need to be very careful about doing that because we can't you can't see that god is going to punish somebody for every single sin they commit that is not the message of the bible and we need to be careful when we see oh it's because of such and such a sin that this is happening but if that's the case today why is it that we can be very specific about the reasons for what's going on in israel in the elishaste well we've got to remember that there's a special relationship between god and israel because he has chosen the children of israel to be his own people and as happens when there's a close bond between people whether it's in a marriage whether it's in

friendship whatever it might be each party has high expectations of the other and each party has expectations of the other party that they wouldn't have of everybody else around them for example a doctor trying to find a cure for a patient has a right to expect the patient to be honest about what she's feeling and the patient has a right to expect the doctor to do his or her best for her or if you have a friend who shares something that's bothering them he or she has the right to expect you to keep that to yourself another christian he or she has the right to expect you to pray for them and to support them in their situation and that's the sort of situation we have here between god and israel so is every famine in the world a judgment from god i don't think so because the specific rules that god set about using famine as a judgment only related to israel basically said to them if you disobey me as a people this is the consequence but the principles of the danger of disobeying god are still relevant for us today disobeying god still leads to consequences for us might not be fine well how does this affect us then well surely we can when we look around us when we look at society when we look at our country we can see that there's a famine in our land today there's a spiritual and not moral famine in scotland and the uk isn't there even in the church at large there's a famine in far too many cases people aren't hearing the true gospel being preached they aren't being fed they aren't being nourished and strengthened and built up and the results are clear for anyone to see the gospel is being watered down so much that it barely resembles what we have in god's word and friend if that's the case in the church is it at all surprising that there's a spiritual famine in our country but of course you and i have to take responsibility for ourselves as well because i'm sure if you're honest that you like me so often do plenty to starve your own soul well there's famine in the land there's famine in the church and there's famine in a multitude of souls so that's the first step that there's famine in the land and the second one is that there is hunger in the house hunger in the house well where there's famine there's hunger that's natural enough it's obvious and where there's famine everyone is affected so here we are in this town or village of gilgal in the house where the sons of the prophets lived now most people seem to think that this was a sort of training college for the training college for the prophets and the term sons of the prophets refer to young men who are training in whatever in that sort of prophetic ministry whatever exactly that means and here we have elisha the great prophet of israel visiting the prophets or the trainee prophets in gilgal so what have these prophets done wrong that they're suffering this famine see that's what many christians ask isn't it when they have difficulties or challenges in their lives what have i done wrong why is god unhappy with me but here friends there's nothing to suggest that the prophets have done anything specific to deserve

this judgment from god it's important to remember famine was a judgment for a specific sin the nation turning their back on god i don't think these prophets have turned their back on god at all so they are not being judged personally although they are being judged as part of the nation of israel it's not always about what you or i have done wrong as individuals it can be wrong for us to think that and often problems come into a country or a community or even a church because of a few people because of one person perhaps and usually in the bible when this happens it happens because the leaders of the country especially kings have gone wrong and the reason for that is that the king as a kind of figurehead represents the entire country before god for example imagine just now if britain experienced a specific judgment because of a specific law that was passed in parliament the whole of the country would be under god's judgment because of what happened even though the final decision about the law was arrived at by a few hundred people see because our politicians are our representatives and we as a country have elected them to represent us they make the decisions that we can be affected and the reason for the judgment is the responsibility of a few but the effect of the judgment is experienced by all and the same is true the other way when israel when israel's kings followed god and honored god the whole nation generally experienced his blessing but notice especially here that god's own people are suffering now christ says doesn't be time and again that the christian's life isn't an easy one and here we see that there's no guarantee whatsoever that the christian won't suffer because of other people's sins this is the situation here in gilgore and because they're affected by the famine because they're being affected by god's judgment on the country they go out to look for food and then we have the third step so we have famine in the land hunger in the house and then thirdly death in the pot death in the pot well elusha and his servant are here in the prophet's house in gilgore and the sons of the prophets these young men who are training to be prophets are starving a few things to notice here first of all notice that it's elusha who says set on the large pot or put on the large pot and he's only a guest in the house but the young prophets obviously respect him when he tells them what to do and i think what's happening here fits in with the idea that this is a training college elisha is the main prophet in the land at the time and if this is a college to train other prophets it makes sense that he would visit them from time to time to teach them well whatever the situation elisha takes charge and then notice the detail of what elisha says put on the large pot that's in verse 38 now nothing in the bible is by accident so why does elisha tell them to put the large pot on

doesn't he know that there's no food to cook well the sons of the prophets they're feeling this and they're probably shocked maybe they think oh brilliant he's going to perform a miracle and fill this pot with food or maybe they're going to the other extreme and think the old man's lost it he hasn't got a clue there's not even enough food in the house to fill a plate let alone the large pot and whatever they're thinking elisha asks for the large pot and that's what they put on the fire to prepare for cooking but surely the wording here is a reminder to us of the immensity of god's grace even in the midst of famine he's able to fill a large pot with food they don't have any but he's still able to provide it but it's not just notice that it's not just that he's willing to provide it he's able to provide it as well for us there are plenty of things that we would do if we could we may want to help the persecuted church we may want to support refugees coming from syria we may want to uh want to convert a family or friends these are things that we want to do but with power we are willing but we are not able our friends god is willing and he is able do you believe that for yourself do you believe that he's willing and able to help you whatever your situation is you might feel that you're in the middle of a spiritual famine yourself you might feel that you're in the middle of some overwhelming difficulty which you can't see a way out of yourself but do you believe that god can feed you even in a famine do you believe that god can rescue you even when it seems hopeless you see that's the kind of god that we have he's the god who can make riches from rats he can give something from nothing and he can give life to the dead what an amazing god he is so this large pot goes on the fire ready for something to be cooked in it and one person goes out to gather uh herbs or vegetables or something of that sort for their dinner why did only one person go out and it looks like it was a young man either one of the sons of the prophets with a title like that you'd think he'd be a fairly young person or elisha's servant the hebrew word used means boy or young man maybe a teenager and it's the same word that's used to describe the youths who are mocking elisha at the end of chapter two um it's translated as young boys in the esv and children and the av but we can't be sure about his age but he's definitely fairly young so here we have one young man going out to gather food for everyone in the house in the middle of the the famine and as we read the herbs he gathered are cooked in the pot the prophets begin eating the stew and then this awful desperate shout goes up from them all sitting around eating oh man of god there is death in the pot i've maybe said this before here and forgive me if i have but i think so often we read the stories from the bible and we think of them as stories we don't really

[20 : 22] appreciate that these things happened and imagine if you were sitting in a corner in that room with these maybe a couple of dozen or whatever number of young men and all of a sudden every one of them starts shouting in agony and terror because they know they're dying what's that like because that's the situation here for whatever reason when they started eating they knew there was something far wrong they knew that whatever they were eating was going to kill them and they fully expected to all be dead this is a horrible horrible situation but why is there death in the pot what's the cause of that how are they all at work just because they've taken a spoonful or two of that stew well what would do to the pot this young man who went out he collected some sort of herbs or vegetables and that's what they used to make the stew now it can be dangerous to spiritualize things from the bible but i think we have to spiritualize this a little bit if we're going to make it relevant for us today i think that the message for the church and by the church i don't just mean those who are christians the message for everybody who hears this i think right through the ages and forever the end of time is this be careful what you take in be careful what you swallow not in a literal way of course but in terms of spiritual food because this is what's happened here one of these young prophets goes out he's gathered food he's hungry himself he feels responsibility because he knows that everyone in the house is starving as well he knows it's not going to be easy to find food because there's nothing growing and all of a sudden he comes across this plant which has some kind of hair or berry or whatever growing on it and the thing looks ripe and tasty and full of flavor and he looks at them and he thinks they'll make a good meal so he gathers them in and he takes them back to the house but there are three things wrong with this picture the first problem is that it's a young man who goes out looking for food in the midst of the family now why is that a problem well it's a problem because he doesn't have enough experience or knowledge and a lack of experience can be a dangerous thing now let's be clear here do not misunderstand me i'm not saying for a second that a young christian can't be youthful uh to god and to the church of course he or she can many are used by god but i think the principle we have here is this that people shouldn't rely on a spiritual youngster to be fed to feed them in general terms there might be exceptions but in general terms and paul deals with both sides of this issue uh when he's writing to timothy he says let no one despise you for your youth and paul surely here means that timothy shouldn't be looked down on by others because he's a young man or because he's a young christian but in the same letter he gives timothy advice about choosing men to lead the church and particularly in a spiritual sense and one of the qualities that a leader in the church should have according to paul is that he must not be a recent convert now there's a real balancing act going on

here we have to be careful how we approach it the bible tells us that it's a young man who puts all of the sons of the prophets in danger because he doesn't know what he's gathering he doesn't know what he's fed there and maybe the same thing would have happened if an older man had gone out but it's likely an older man would have had more knowledge and experience and perhaps been more careful and although we've got a young man here surely as a principle if we're going to find something that we can learn for ourselves here as a principle we need to see him as representing a young christian someone who is to use paul's phrase a recent convert and what we need to see in this incident friends is the important difference between knowledge and ignorance but also we need to be careful that you and i don't think that something like this couldn't possibly happen to us because we've been christians for many years because even when you have the knowledge and experience and understanding ignorance and sin still get the upper hand and can wreak havoc in your life and mine can't they and the second problem here is that this young man goes out alone now there are times in the christian life when you may need to find your own spiritual food as it were when you have to be alone but that's not how the christian should ordinarily be each and every christian is a member of the body of christ one unit as it were and the bible tells us that we should be living and fellowshiping and worshipping and serving together feeding on christ together and if two or three or four men have gone out looking for food together instead of this one man there's less chance that this near disaster happens because they could talk amongst each other and they can say well what do you think well i've never seen that but i know that's poisonous or whatever but there is strength in numbers and it's unhealthy for any christian to be on his or her own for an extended period of time and certainly not all the time remember the advice the writer gives in hebrews it is consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and doesn't christ himself promise to be where two or three are gathered together in his name fellowship friends is essential for the christian and then the third problem we have here is that the young man goes out when he's hungry and of course he's probably not hungry in the normal sense in the way that you or i might say now towards tea time i'm hungry i want my food he's probably starving he's probably had very little food over the previous weeks and he's probably desperate to eat but why is that important it's important because when someone is hungry they will eat just about anything alston beg talks about christians who accept and believe wrong teaching especially when they aren't being fed with good teaching and he compares it with uh going to the supermarket for your shopping when you're hungry because as he puts it when you're hungry and you're in the supermarket who knows what you're going to put in your trunk and that is true because when you're in a shop and you're really hungry your mind plays tricks on you and before you know it you're buying something that you've never tried or something that you didn't like the last time you tried it or something that's completely unhealthy and not good for you well the same is true spiritually if your soul is starving there's every chance that you'll

swallow anything that you're offered any doctrine any teaching maybe even complete another heresy and that's especially true when you're offered something that's appealing to your eye to your ear to your conscience something that's going to make you feel a bit better about yourself something that's going to make you think well i don't really i'm not really in that much danger it's not really that important that i think about this whole christianity thing it's dangerous to go looking for food when you're starving because who knows what you might swallow so if you shouldn't go looking when for food when you're starving when should you well you could do it when you're satisfied how does that make sense we'll go back to the supermarket analogy if you go shopping when you're satisfied when you're not when your belly's not crying out for something there's less chance of something unhealthy and harmful grabbing your attention and if you and i feed on christ in the gospel if we meditate about it if we talk about what he's done and what he's doing and what he's going to do in our lives we do that together your tastes friends and mine will be so used to the sweet nourishing experience of feasting on him that you'll have no desire whatsoever for the rubbish that is being peddled by so many how are you going to be satisfied by the food that god provides to such an extent that you won't want to taste anything else well listen to isaiah's description on this mountain the lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food a feast of well aged wine rich food full of marrow for the aged wine well we find who would want to eat anything else after tasting that what we have here is the difference between spiritual fine dining and spiritual junk food i don't think either that this is just a warning uh to us about what we take in i think it's also a warning about adding things to our faith remember that something about these these herbs just good these girls uh the young man found they attracted him to them they seemed good they looked tasty maybe they even looked similar to something that he was used to eating and he thinks because of all this he thinks they'll be good to eat but there's a danger that we put things that are out that are of that are of no use things that are harmful things that may be rid of themselves are fine but we can make too big a thing of them we can put these things into our christianity and perhaps our practices perhaps our traditions perhaps our expectations for example thinking that you ought to feel a certain way at a communion maybe some of these things are doing more harm than good at times you need to use the bible as a recipe book as it were you need to think about the ingredients that you're putting into your life into your christianity and see if they are in god's recipe for his people and if they're not given away because if your faith is mixed with something unhelpful some harmful belief there could be death in your experience even as a christian not friends ultimately spiritual death but a lack of usefulness in the church and the community and a deadness in your own life there's famine in the land there's hunger in the house there's death in the pot and then finally

there's healing there's healing there's healing there's healing there's healing in the flour but despite everything that happens Bisha keeps calm and he takes charge of the situation again and he asks someone to bring in flour to mix into the stew that's in the pot the flour goes in the sons of the prophets eat more of the stew out of the pot and the poison or whatever it was that was killing them is taken out and instead of death being in the pot there's life and there's sustenance and there's nourishment in the pot why does Elijah put flour into the mixture in the pot and how does he know that he should do this well i don't think the second question is all that important it was clearly revealed to him that by god in some way has happened with the prophets but the first question friends is vital why did he use flour and put that in the pot and not anything else well the flour obviously must have acted as some kind of antidote some kind of medicine working against whatever was making the men do and that's interesting in of itself but the main point i think is what the flour represents and this takes us back to what was known as the meal offering the hebrew word for meal offering is munshah and apparently it means an offering or a gift that is given to somebody more honorable or more noble than yourself such as to a king or a queen it's an offering that shows thankfulness and shows humility and it's also an offering that was made in different ways depending on the offerer's situation the person making the offering could use raw flour they could have made unleavened cakes with it or they could roast the flour now the poorest people in the land used raw flour and that's what the english i do this here and isn't that really appropriate because these sons of the prophets they are poor they're poor because of the famine in the land and they're poor in terms of their desperate situation there was no time to bake some kind of cake with it there was no time to roast this flour it had to be flung in as quickly as possible now every offering and sacrifice of course represents christ and this one's no different this is what cw slamming says about the meal offering in the meal offering christ is seen as the corn of wheat which fell into the ground and died that he might bring forth much fruit it was also the corn of wheat which went through the crushing mill of gethsemane and the fierce oven of calvary to become the bread of life the sustainer of his people on a pilgrim journey he gave his all he knew no reservation he came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many and now upon him we feed and find our source of strength there is death in the pot for the sons of the prophets but they find healing in the flower that represents christ and his word but notice that it isn't enough for them to have the flower in the house it was lying around somewhere but that didn't save them they had to use it and that of course raises another question for us do you and do i use the bible where you will find feeding for your soul as you should put it in their houses put it in the shell not enough is it but not only do they have to use the flour they have to eat it see if elisha had just pulled into the stew in the pot and stirred it around and they hadn't eaten any more it wouldn't have done them any good whatsoever and they would have died and you can be sure that they

went that they're not happy when elisha tells them to eat more of what's killing them but they must have had faith wasn't they and they trust him as god's messenger and they do as he says well maybe sometimes you feel that the bible is a closed book to you maybe you sometimes feel you don't understand it you don't get it it has no meaning maybe that's what it is at times but friends despite feeling like that it's in the bible that you'll get encouragement and guidance for your journey through life and where you'll get healing for your soul when you need it not always easy but it is where you'll find the bread of life for you to feed on it well there might be death in the pot for the christian from time to time there might be times when you feel cut off from god when you're feeding on junk instead of on christ when what you're thinking or believing is harming your christian life and defectiveness but friends if you're ever in that situation the answer to all your problems the only possible answer to all your problems is right here the lord jesus christ but if you aren't a believer there's death in the pot all the time it's a different kind of death as well because if you're rejecting christ it's as if you're feasting you're gorging on the poison that you know will destroy you and you're loving it but even as we're doing that god's standing by and he's saying i've got the antidote for that poison right here ask me to put it in ask me to give it to you and i will but what are you going to say to him are you going to carry on destroying yourself or are you going to accept his offer friend friend you have no idea when that author is going to run out so take him up on it take him up on it tonight because as long as you ignore it there's nothing but death ahead in a spiritual and eternal sense the only place you'll find life and salvation and healing is in jesus christ and he's not just able to give it what is willing rather to give it he is able to give it as well i am he said the living bread that came down from heaven if anyone eats of this bread it will live for you it's not worth it it's it's it's it's it's it's it's