

ELISHA

(a series of Ancient Plays of Israel)

These plays are taken verbatim from the King James Version. There is a single Storyteller assigned to the narrative lines. Lines of dialogue are assigned to separate characters.

Jars of Oil
(2 Kings 4:1-7)

STORYTELLER

Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying.

WOMAN

Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

STORYTELLER

And Elisha said unto her.

ELISHA

What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?

STORYTELLER

And she said.

WOMAN

Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.

STORYTELLER

Then he said.

ELISHA

Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

STORYTELLER

So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son.

WOMAN

Bring me yet a vessel.

STORYTELLER

And he said unto her.

SON

There is not a vessel more.

STORYTELLER

And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said.

ELISHA

Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

The Woman of Shunem

(II Kings 4:8-37)

STORYTELLER

And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband.

WOMAN

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.

STORYTELLER

And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant.

ELISHA

Call this Shunammite.

STORYTELLER

And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him.

ELISHA

Say now unto her.

GEHAZI

Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?

STORYTELLER

And she answered.

WOMAN

I dwell among mine own people.

STORYTELLER

And he said.

ELISHA

What then is to be done for her?

STORYTELLER

And Gehazi answered.

GEHAZI

Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.

STORYTELLER

And he said.

ELISHA

Call her.

STORYTELLER

And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said.

ELISHA

About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son.

STORYTELLER

And she said.

WOMAN

Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

STORYTELLER

And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father.

SON

My head, my head.

STORYTELLER

And he said to a lad.

HUSBAND

Carry him to his mother.

STORYTELLER

And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died.

And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out.

And she called unto her husband, and said.

WOMAN

Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.

STORYTELLER

And he said.

HUSBAND

Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? It is neither new moon, nor sabbath.

STORYTELLER

And she said.

WOMAN

It shall be well.

STORYTELLER

Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant.

WOMAN

Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee.

STORYTELLER

So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant.

ELISHA

Behold, yonder is that Shunammite. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her. Is it well with thee?

GEHAZI

Is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?

STORYTELLER

And she answered.

WOMAN

It is well.

STORYTELLER

And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said.

ELISHA

Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.

STORYTELLER

Then she said.

WOMAN

Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?

STORYTELLER

Then he said to Gehazi.

ELISHA

Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child.

STORYTELLER

And the mother of the child said.

WOMAN

As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.

STORYTELLER

And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying.

GEHAZI

The child is not awaked.

STORYTELLER

And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.

And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

And he called Gehazi, and said.

ELISHA

Call this Shunammite.

STORYTELLER

So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said.

ELISHA

Take up thy son.

STORYTELLER

Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.

Pottage
(II Kings 4:38-41)

STORYTELLER

And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant.

ELISHA

Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.

STORYTELLER

And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not.

So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said.

PROPHET

O thou man of God, there is death in the pot.

STORYTELLER

And they could not eat thereof.

STORYTELLER

But he said.

ELISHA

Then bring meal.

STORYTELLER

And he cast it into the pot; and he said.

ELISHA

Pour out for the people, that they may eat.

STORYTELLER

And there was no harm in the pot.

Naaman's Leprosy
(2 Kings 5)

STORYTELLER

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress.

SERVANT GIRL

Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

STORYTELLER

And one went in, and told his lord, saying.

SERVANT

Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.

STORYTELLER

And the king of Syria said.

KING OF SYRIA

Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel.

STORYTELLER

And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying.

KING OF SYRIA

Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.

STORYTELLER

And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said.

KING OF ISRAEL

Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

STORYTELLER

And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying.

GEHAZI

Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

STORYTELLER

So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying.

GEHAZI

Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

STORYTELLER

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said.

NAMAAN

Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?

STORYTELLER

So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said.

SERVANT

My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

STORYTELLER

Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said.

NAMAAN

Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.

STORYTELLER

But he said.

ELISHA

As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.

STORYTELLER

And he urged him to take it; but he refused. And Naaman said.

NAMAAN

Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing.

STORYTELLER

And he said unto him.

ELISHA

Go in peace.

STORYTELLER

So he departed from him a little way. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said.

GEHAZI

Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.

STORYTELLER

So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said.

NAMAAN

Is all well?

STORYTELLER

And he said.

GEHAZI

All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.

STORYTELLER

And Naaman said.

NAMAAN

Be content, take two talents.

STORYTELLER

And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him.

ELISHA

Whence comest thou, Gehazi?

STORYTELLER

And he said.

GEHAZI

Thy servant went no whither.

STORYTELLER

And he said unto him.

ELISHA

Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever.

STORYTELLER

And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.

The Axe Head
(II Kings 6: 1-7)

STORYTELLER

And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha.

PROPHET

Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell.

STORYTELLER

And he answered.

ELISHA

Go ye.

STORYTELLER

And one said.

SECOND PROPHET

Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants.

STORYTELLER

And he answered.

ELISHA

I will go.

STORYTELLER

So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said.

THIRD PROPHET

Alas, master! For it was borrowed.

STORYTELLER

And the man of God said.

ELISHA

Where fell it?

STORYTELLER

And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he.

ELISHA

Take it up to thee.

STORYTELLER

And he put out his hand, and took it.

The Bands of Syria
(II Kings 6:8-23)

STORYTELLER

Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying.

KING OF SYRIA

In such and such a place shall be my camp.

STORYTELLER

And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying.

ELISHA'S SERVANT

Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.

STORYTELLER

And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.

Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them.

KING OF SYRIA

Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?

STORYTELLER

And one of his servants said.

SYRIAN SOLDIER

None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

STORYTELLER

And he said.

KING OF SYRIA

Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him.

STORYTELLER

And it was told him, saying.

SYRIAN SOLDIER

Behold, he is in Dothan.

STORYTELLER

Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him.

ELISHA'S SERVANT

Alas, my master! how shall we do?

STORYTELLER

And he answered.

ELISHA

Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

STORYTELLER

And Elisha prayed, and said.

ELISHA

LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.

STORYTELLER

And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said.

ELISHA

Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.

STORYTELLER

And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

And Elisha said unto them.

ELISHA

This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek.

STORYTELLER

But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said.

ELISHA

LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.

STORYTELLER

And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them.

KING OF ISRAEL

My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?

STORYTELLER

And he answered.

ELISHA

Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

STORYTELLER

And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

The Four Lepers
(II Kings 6:24 - 7:20)

STORYTELLER

And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying.

WOMAN

Help, my lord, O king.

STORYTELLER

And he said.

KING OF ISRAEL

If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?

STORYTELLER

And the king said unto her.

KING OF ISRAEL

What aileth thee?

STORYTELLER

And she answered.

WOMAN

This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.

STORYTELLER

And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh. Then he said.

KING OF ISRAEL

God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.

STORYTELLER

But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders.

ELISHA

See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?

STORYTELLER

And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said.

KING OF ISRAEL

Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?

STORYTELLER

Then Elisha said.

ELISHA

Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.

STORYTELLER

Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said.

LORD OF THE KING

Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?

STORYTELLER

And he said.

ELISHA

Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

STORYTELLER

And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another.

LEPER ONE

Why sit we here?

LEPER FOUR

Until we die.

LEPER TWO

If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and...

LEPER FOUR

We shall die there.

LEPER ONE

And if we sit still here...

LEPER FOUR

We die also.

LEPER TWO

Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians:

LEPER THREE

if they save us alive, we shall live;

LEPER ONE

and if they kill us....

LEPER FOUR

We shall but die.

STORYTELLER

And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the LORD had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another: Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. Then they said one to another.

LEPER ONE

We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace:

LEPER TWO

if we tarry till the morning light....

LEPER FOUR

some mischief will come upon us:

LEPER THREE

now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.

STORYTELLER

So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying,

LEPER ONE

We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there.

LEPER TWO

neither voice of man,

LEPER THREE

but horses tied.

LEPER ONE

and asses tied

LEPER TWO

and the tents as they were.

(And they cover the fourth leper's mouth before he can speak.)

STORYTELLER

And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within. And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants.

KING OF ISRAEL

I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.

STORYTELLER

And one of his servants answered and said.

LORD OF THE KING

Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see.

STORYTELLER

They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying.

KING OF ISRAEL

Go and see.

STORYTELLER

And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD. And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him. And it came to pass

LEPER ONE

as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria:

LEPER TWO

And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be?

LEPER ONE

And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

LEPER THREE

And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate.

LEPER FOUR

And he died.

Ancient Plays of Israel

Isaiah 5

¹¹ Woe to those who rise early in the morning
to run after their drinks,
who stay up late at night
till they are inflamed with wine.

¹² They have harps and lyres at their banquets,
tambourines and flutes and wine,
but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD ,
no respect for the work of his hands.

Dr. Tom Boogaart wonders whether what the above passage refers to. Is it possible, he asks, that this is a reference to ancient enactments of the deeds and work of the LORD? Is this a clue to the performed narratives in the context of ancient Hebrew worship gatherings which would have naturally included food and drink?