

**BELIEVERS BEWARE!**  
**OR**  
**DANGERS IN THE DAY OF FAMINE**  
**2 KINGS 4.38-41**  
Mark Kolchin

As the return of the Lord draws closer each day, the need for spiritual discernment among Christians will be of the utmost importance. The devil knows that his time is short and as the last days come to a close, he will pull out every stop and utilize every device in his arsenal to waylay the saints and waltz the unsaved to their destruction. Paul reminded Timothy that in the latter times *“some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils...”* (1 Timothy 4.1). Peter likewise warned: *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you...”* (2 Peter 2.1). There have always been false prophets in the world and false teachers in the Church, but toward the end of the last days their presence and power will intensify as Satan drags his own net across the sea of humanity and over a world system in which he has long held sway. Christians are to function as salt and light, but as the world grows increasingly corrupt and plunges more deeply into spiritual darkness, the Church’s testimony and influence in the world will be largely nullified unless spiritual vigilance is maintained. What can happen when believers are not spiritually discerning can be seen from an interesting episode in the ministry of the prophet Elisha.

**THE SETTING**

Elisha lived during one of the darkest times in Israel’s history. His mentor, Elijah had in his day boldly prophesied to King Ahab that it would not rain because of the sin and idolatry that characterized the nation. Knowing the Scriptures as he did provided the man of God with the impetus to make such a powerful statement. Accordingly, a famine swept over the land, paralleling the spiritual famine that prompted it. To counter the effects of this spiritual famine, Elijah established schools for the sons of the prophets at strategic locations across the land. These schools were for the benefit of young men whom he personally disciplined, drawn together by a desire for mutual encouragement and edification. Upon Elijah’s translation to heaven (2 Kings 2), this duty was transferred to Elisha his protégé who picked up the mantel and followed in his steps. On this occasion, Elisha requested that his servant put on a great pot following a time of spiritual instruction and boil stew for the sons of the prophets. But without saying a word, this servant apparently acted independently and went out into the field, gathered a lapful of wild gourds, and brought them back to be sliced into a pot of stew. When it was offered to the sons of the prophets, they could not eat it and cried out to Elisha, *“There is death in this pot!”* With that, Elisha instantly ordered that meal be put into the pot, which miraculously counteracted the effects of the poisonous gourds.

**THE SIMILARITY**

As we put the magnifying glass upon this portion of God’s Word, there are a number of present-day similarities that immediately jump out. First is the similarity between Israel’s condition then and the world’s condition now. Just as there was a spiritual famine in the time of Elisha, so too there is a spiritual famine in our world today. The prophet Amos wrote: *“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD”* (Amos 8:11). For Israel, disobedience to the word of God brought about God’s judgment, resulting in a lack of rain causing conditions in which healthy food was scarce and harmful food was in abundance. In our world, the profusion of harmful, poisonous “food” expressed through the arts, literature, philosophy and other forms of media simply substantiates the fact that there is a “famine” in the land – a dearth of the hearing of the words of the Lord, brought on by a widespread repudiation of God’s truth (Romans 1). Consequently, there are spiritual dangers at every turn. Paul wrote Timothy: *“Take heed*

*to thyself and to the doctrine*” (1 Timothy 4:16), emphasizing the need to be watchful in his personal life and the spiritual food that he ate. How much more should the Body of Christ in these perilous times?

### **THE SERVANT**

Another similarity can be seen in the actions of Elisha’s servant. Like this servant, many well-meaning, but naïve believers can also be guilty of gathering harmful “food”, that is false doctrine and introducing it into the assembly, bringing about much distress among the Lord’s people. The fact that he might have acted independently only highlights the need for personal accountability in the Body and the importance to closely monitor the spiritual actions of the younger generation. Perhaps if he had stated what he was going to do, this disaster would have been averted. Could it be that he thought that a few more items introduced into the stew were necessary to fill up the “great pot” or even to make it more tasteful? If so, it could easily represent the enthusiastic, but erroneous intentions of many novices in the Lord. After all, it was a “great pot” and like the Word of God, it is a sufficient provision for the people of God with no additives needed!

### **THE SOURCE**

The vine which was the source of the problem is also a key similarity. When the servant left the house, he was venturing outside, a dangerous place in the time of famine. As it was then, so it is now—the world is filled with “wild vines” that look healthy enough and that grow in abundance, but are actually deceitfully poisonous, as seen by the adverse reaction that it had upon the sons of the prophets. The fact that he returned with his lap full in a time of famine was prima facie evidence that something was dreadfully wrong! Vines often lie close to the earth and as such remind us of the origin and the emphasis of all false doctrine and the “dirt” that surrounds it. The apostle Paul voiced this truth when he stated in Colossians 2:8: *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”*. Believers need to be on their guard and need to have a Berean spirit to make sure that all spiritual teaching accords with Scripture, lest in the course of time they find out in a hard way, that it is not. Believers beware!

### **THE SONS**

Further, there is also a valuable lesson illustrated in the sons of the prophets. These would-be disciples made the common mistake that many of God’s people make – they ate anything and everything put before them! At the least, they should have inquired as to what was in the stew. Unfortunately, they soon found out! They were not told, neither did they ask. There is one thing however, that they did do correctly – they went to a man of God who was more experienced and wiser than they. They knew something was wrong, but they did not know how to correct it. Note this carefully young people—do not go it alone, take your questions and your quandaries to those who are older and more mature in the faith and undoubtedly they will give you valuable advice that will keep you from harm.

### **THE SOLUTION**

What was the solution to this whole mess? When Elisha’s help was solicited, the solution came by introducing meal into the pot of stew. Meal, especially fine meal speaks of the moral and consistently fine life of Christ (C.P. Lev. 2). The antidote for any false doctrine comes down to a proper understanding and application of the Person and Work of Christ. This is what will undo the adverse effects of false teaching. Note that the servant was not exhorted to throw out the pot or even tip it over, but rather he was given the task of counteracting its contents with that which was nourishing to the sons of the prophets. Nor was the servant ostracized for bringing the poisonous gourds in. As a matter of fact, the servant was the very one who was given the task to purify the stew. What a lesson there!

How many believers through the centuries have picked up some poisonous gourd and brought on adverse consequences or even personal suffering, has witnessed the miraculous turnaround that results from feeding on a diet rich on the Person of Christ?

#### **CONCLUSION**

The Apostle Paul commended the Philippian believers for their spiritual discernment when he said: “*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment*” (Philippians 1:9). That same spiritual judgment is what believers everywhere (especially elders) need to exercise if they are to avoid the dangers that abound in the day of famine.