QUESTION:

In the Bible, we encounter a woman described as “the Shunammite,” who generously supported the prophet Elisha by offering him a place to stay during his ministry. But who was she exactly? And what does the term *“Shunammite”* actually mean?

The Text in Focus:

2 Kings 4:12–13 (ESV)

> “And he said to Gehazi his servant, ‘Call this Shunammite.’ When he had called her, she stood before him. And he said to him, ‘Say now to her, See, you have taken all this trouble for us; what is to be done for you?’”

From this, we learn that Elisha held this woman in high regard for her exceptional hospitality. But is *“Shunammite”* her name? Let’s explore.

ANSWER:

Upon reading the broader context of 2 Kings 4, it becomes clear that “Shunammite” is not a personal name—it’s a geographical title. It identifies the woman’s place of origin: the town of Shunem in ancient Israel.

2 Kings 4:8 (ESV)

> “One day Elisha went on to Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to eat some food. So whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food.”

Therefore, “Shunammite” simply means a person from Shunem just as someone from Tanzania would be called a Tanzanian. This was a common way of identifying people in the biblical world.

Where Was Shunem?

Shunem was located in the territory assigned to the tribe of Issachar, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is confirmed in

the book of Joshua:

Joshua 19:17–18 (ESV)

> “The fourth lot came out for Issachar, for the people of Issachar, according to their clans. Their territory included Jezreel, Chesulloth, Shunem…”

Theologically, this matters because the tribes of Israel were not just random geographic groups they were covenantal communities chosen by God. The Shunammite woman’s inclusion in Scripture highlights that God often uses faithful individuals from lesser-known places to accomplish His purposes.

A Woman of Remarkable Character

This Shunammite woman is described as *“wealthy”* or *“a great woman”* (Hebrew: אִשָּׁה גְּדוֹלָה, *ishah gedolah*), implying both material prosperity and moral or social standing (2 Kings 4:8). Her actions reveal deep spiritual discernment and generosity she recognized Elisha as a man of God and prepared a room for him

in her home (2 Kings 4:9–10).

This act of hospitality fulfills the spiritual principle later emphasized in the New Testament:

Hebrews 13:2 (ESV)

> “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Though not an angel, Elisha was a prophet and servant of the Lord, and her provision for him was an act of faith and service to God Himself (cf. Matthew 10:41).

Not the Only Shunammite in the Bible

Another well-known figure from Shunem is Abishag, who cared for King David in his old age:

1 Kings 1:3–4 (ESV)

> “So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not.”

Like the earlier Shunammite, Abishag was entrusted with a sacred responsibility, showing again that individuals from Shunem played significant, though often quiet, roles in God’s redemptive history.

Theological Significance

God values hidden faithfulness. The Shunammite woman wasn’t a prophet, priest, or queen yet her story is preserved in Scripture. Why? Because hospitality to God’s servants is hospitality to God Himself (cf. Matthew 25:40).

God rewards faith and kindness. After Elisha asked what he could do for her, she declined any reward. Yet God later rewarded her by giving her a son (2 Kings 4:16), and even later, Elisha raised

that son from the dead (2 Kings 4:35). This shows that our acts of kindness may lead to blessings beyond imagination.

Ordinary people play extraordinary roles in God’s plan. The title “Shunammite” reminds us that even people from small, unknown towns like Shunem can be instruments of divine purpose.

Conclusion

The Shunammite woman teaches us that faithful hospitality, spiritual discernment, and generosity can open the door to powerful encounters with God. Her story challenges us to recognize and honor God’s work even when it comes through ordinary people in ordinary places.

May we, like her, be found faithful in whatever “Shunem” God has placed us.

God bless you.

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