

## **Raising of the Widow's Son by Elijah** **I Kings 17:1, 8 -19, 22-24**

**“Elijah was the first great prophet of the northern Kingdom of Israel. He is identified with the period in Hebrew history in which the prophets began to appear as dominant figures to combat widespread apostasy [total departure from one's faith or religion, a total desertion of faith] and raise the ethical standard of Israel's religious worship.**

“The social discontent generated under Solomon reached its climax at the accession of Solomon's son Rehoboam to the throne. The kingdom was split when ten of the twelve tribes revolted against Rehoboam's rule. This rift was an important event in Israel's history. The United Kingdom was divided (933/32 B.C.E.): the tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the southern Kingdom of Judah, continuing to be loyal to the house of David; the remaining ten tribes formed the northern Kingdom of Israel. These two monarchies went on side by side for the next two centuries. . . .

“Ahab, seventh king of Israel, was one of its most apostate [one who has forsaken church to which he before had adhered; one who has abandoned his religion] rulers. Ahab's wife Jezebel was a Phoenician princess of Tyre, a fanatic champion of her native deity Baal, and through her influence Tyrian Baal worship with its gross immoralities was introduced into Israel. It flourished widely and threatened to smother the faint monotheism which still remained.

“During this period of almost total apostasy the great prophet Elijah suddenly appeared to pronounce God's judgment of Ahab's sinful conduct” (Shotwell 118).

“The name Elijah means ‘Yah is El,’ El being the general Semitic name for the High God. Thus Elijah's own name is the proclamation of his message. It is one of a number of instances in which, perhaps by deliberate intent, the name fits the character or the mission: e.g., Isaiah ‘Yah is salvation,’ etc.” (*IB* 3.145).

“PROPHET. A spiritual seer; disappearance of material sense before the conscious facts of spiritual Truth” (*S&H* 593).

“A grander figure never stood out even against the Old Testament sky than that of Elijah. As Israel's apostasy had reached its highest point in the time of Ahab, so the Old Testament antagonism to it in the person and mission of Elijah. . . . As we

view him as Jehovah's representative, almost plenipotentiary, we recall unswerving faithfulness to, and absolutely fearless discharge of his trust" (Edersheim 185-186).

**1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, (near Naphtali) said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.**

"The Hebrew Bible has Elijah as one 'among the sojourners (settler) of Gilead,' and 'Tishbe' does not appear as a place-name anywhere" (*NIBC* 3.126). "The name Elijah means 'Yah is El,' El being the general Semitic name for the High God. Thus Elijah's own name is the proclamation of his message. It one of a number of instances in which, perhaps, by deliberate intent, the name fits the character or the mission" (*IB* 3.145).

"Elijah's oath affirms that it is the Lord who lives, and the rest of the narrative will make plain that it is the Lord who makes life possible. Elijah, as the servant of the Lord also dares to declare that there will be 'neither dew nor rain,' except by his word. The servant of the Lord thus challenges the power of Baal directly, for drought is a sign of the powerlessness of Baal, according to Canaanite lore" (*NIBC* 3.126-127).

"Elijah came from Tishbe in Naphtali, but he had settled among the Gileadites east of the Jordan" (*IB* 3.145).

"Of his preparation and call to the prophetic office there is no record, but his words 'before whom I stand' show his authorization and mark him as a chosen servant of God. . . . To protect him from Ahab's wrath God commanded . . . 'Arise, get thee to Zarephath,' [where] he found refuge in the home of an impoverished widow" (Shotwell 118).

"Nothing is related about the reason for the drought which the prophet predicted; but the cause was doubtless Ahab's idolatry" (Dummelow 224).

**8 And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying,**

**9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.**

Zarephath (Sarepta in Greek) is a village some nine miles south of Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. It is known for its exporting of wine, grain, and oil. “Yet, this city in Baal’s territory is ironically in dire straits because of a drought” (NIBC3.128). The widow of Sidon stands in stark contrast to another woman from Sidon, Jezebel, a princess who married King Ahab. Jezebel’s father was the king of Sidon. She promoted the worship of Baal in Israel. Was this widow a worshiper of Baal? And as a widow, she might be in dire straits herself. “In the OT, widows are typically associated with the neediest elements of society, the orphans and the poor. Yet, it is this widow in a land devastated by drought who is to feed Elijah, and it is to her that he turns for sustenance” (NIBC 3.128).

“Zarephath or Sarepta. Obadiah refers to it as a Canaanite (probably meaning Phoenicia) town. Josephus says it was not ‘far from Sidon and Tyre, for it lay between them. Eusebius, places it on the public road, i.e. the road along the seashore. . . it is conjectured that the Syrophenician woman mentioned in Luke 4:26 was an inhabitant of Zarephath” (biblos.com – Bible Atlas).

The widow woman resided in a Gentile area, possibly the area where Jezebel was from. Most certainly she was a Gentile, and not a Jew. A widow in biblical times, who had no inherited wealth or income of her own, was a desperate woman. She was at the lowest end of the social scale. Because she had to depend on charity for survival in the best of times, her position was always precarious. However, during a famine, when the whole country was starving, she found herself completely destitute. This particular woman had no husband and her son was not old enough to provide for her.

**10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.**

*Widow*, in the Bible. “Under the Mosaic dispensation no legal provision was made for the maintenance of widows. They were left dependent partly on the affection of relations, more especially of the eldest son, whose birthright, or extra share of the property, imposed such a duty upon him, and partly on the privileges accorded to other distressed classes, such as a participation in the triennial third tithe, ( 14:29 ; 26:12 ) in leasing, ( 24:19-21 ) and in religious feasts” (Bible Study Tools online).

It’s interesting to ponder the thought of the ‘widow’ woman. She was at a desperate place, at the end of her rope so to speak. There was no visible help for

her, at least humanly. She was totally vulnerable, hopeless and vulnerable and literally on her last meal for herself and her sons. And yet she was willing to share her last meal with the prophet, similar to the widow who gave all that she had at the Temple. Is this the thought that we must have to experience healing?

The widow expressed willingness and obedience, unselfish love and receptivity. She showed great hospitality to the prophet even though she had so little. She had literally lost everything – her husband, her supply, her hope, and yet she ‘fed the prophet first’ with such childlike trust. The widow manifested the qualities in the first three beatitudes: she was ‘poor in spirit’ manifesting willingness and receptivity, she was ‘mourning’ everything that was mortally important to her and letting all that go, recognizing her source of help was higher, and she was ‘meek’, learning that her answers were not in the mortal earth, but in the spiritual sense of Life and Love.

“As it had been Jehovah who ‘commanded’ the ravens, so it was He also Who ‘commanded’ the widow of Sarepta, all unconscious as she was of it, to sustain Elijah. But how should the prophet recognize her? He must go, trusting to God’s direction, and watching such natural indications as would appear, be guided to whither he was supernaturally sent” (Edersheim 672).

11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

12 And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

‘*Ugâ*, the term rendered *cake*, indicates a little disc of bread (later provided for Elijah by God in the wilderness; see 19:6). A cruse was a small earthenware flask. Mention of these modest items underscores the widow’s extreme lack. Yet she unhesitatingly obeys a prophet who is probably unknown to her, and her trust results in an abundant supply of food.

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

Elijah told her to “fear not!” Jesus often used these same words just before he healed a patient, and in a Christian Science treatment, we are taught to get rid of fear as our first step in the healing practice. Clear the deck, so to speak, of anything that would obstruct one from seeing the allness and ever-presence of infinite God.

Elijah then told her to, “Go and do as thou hast said *BUT feed me first!*” Now let’s consider his request for a moment. What might have been in the woman’s thought when she heard Elijah say those words? How did she mentally receive that command? From a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, we know how things worked out, and that might seem like a reasonable request, but to the woman, who appeared to be totally in a hopeless place, and whose son was starving, she must have been distressed at this appeal and not a little terrified. Certainly how could her needs be met, if she shared what little she had with someone else?

At this crisis point, however, when all the human doors were shut, when there was no one else to turn to, she lifted her thought enough to hope in God, to have a budding confidence and faith in Him, and to be obedient to Elijah’s divine demand. With a developing sense of trust, she *feeds the prophet first*.

“ELIAS. [the Greek word for Elijah] Prophecy; spiritual evidence opposed to material sense; Christian Science, with which can be discerned the spiritual fact of whatever the material senses behold; the basis of immortality” (*S&H* 585).

In one sense, Elijah was asking the woman to ‘feed prophecy’ first; to pay strict attention to the spiritual evidence no matter what the material senses were telling her. She was being asked to lift her thought up to the conscious facts of spiritual Truth, to the level of understanding that God truly was the source of her supply, and it was ever-present and uninterrupted.

**14For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.**

Elijah came from a totally different mental standpoint. He had spent a lifetime consistently listening to God, and he was obedient when God told him to go to this Gentile city and find the widow woman who would sustain him through the famine. Of all the people in town who could have helped him, she was the last

person one would choose. On the surface, she was the poorest, the weakest, and the lowest in economic status, but Elijah, being obedient to God's direction, perceived in her a spiritual sense, a quality of thought that could be cultivated, a receptivity, so he asked her to prepare a meal for him.

**15And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.**

“One thing at least is clear: that this heathen woman, whose knowledge of Jehovah could only have been rudimentary and incipient, and who yet, at the word of a stranger, could give up her own and her son's last meal, because a prophet had bidden it, and promised her miraculous supply for the future, must have had the most simple childlike trustfulness in the God of Israel. What lesson this, and how full of comfort, to Elijah!” (Edersheim 673).

**16And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.**

“There, almost hourly these many ‘days,’ the promise proved true, and, day by day, as when Israel gathered the manna in the wilderness, did an unseen Hand provide—and that not only for herself and her son, but for all ‘her household.’ It was a constant miracle” (Edersheim 674).

Under the influence of the prophet's higher thought and spiritual apprehension of God's unlimited abundance, of spiritual prophecy, which Mrs. Eddy defines as “Christian Science,” the widow woman willingly shared all she had, discovering that it was better to give than to receive; and her own needs were immediately supplied. For as long as she needed it, this infinite source of supply was inexhaustible and constant for herself, her son, and Elijah.

In the next few verses, when her son “fell sick and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him” (I Kings 17:17), the widow woman was able to be a significant part of an even higher demonstration when Elijah restored her son from the belief of death into immortal life.

17 And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.

“The stakes are raised higher in this instance than in the other two vignettes in the chapter. Whereas the Lord has been able to avert death by providing first for Elijah through the ravens (vv. 1-7) and then through the widow (vv. 8-16), the challenge is now posed in the form of a boy who has already died” (*NIBC* 3.129).

18 And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

19 And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

Elijah doesn't answer the woman's question. He simply takes action. The loft is the upper chamber on the roof, accessible by an outside stairway. Elijah removes the child from her and goes to his bedchamber so that he might be alone. Symbolically speaking, consider Elijah's methodology: *out of her bosom* and *up into a loft*. In a sense, he's breaking that sense of maternal bond the mother has with her child. What might this action have meant to the mother – a mother who is clinging to the last remaining connection between herself and her son?

21 And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

“Soul” in Hebrew is *nephesh* (Strong 5315). It can mean “life” or “identity.”

“In truth, it was not a time for teaching by words, but by deeds. And Elijah himself was deeply moved. . . . Three times – as when the Name of Jehovah is laid in blessing on His people (Num. 6:24 ff.), and as when the Seraphim raise their voice of praise (Isa. 6:3) – he stretched himself in symbolic action upon the child, calling upon Jehovah as his God” (Edersheim 196).

22 And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Elijah's prayer had been answered.



23 And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

“. . . what a wonderful instance of divine power and goodness” (Gill online)

24 And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.

Does this story indicate that for anyone to declare God’s word and declare it as the truth, one must prove that to be so?

“We can almost see Elijah as he takes down the child to his mother in that darkened room, and says to her only these words of deep emotion, not unmingled with loving reproof: ‘See, thy son liveth!’ Words these, which our blessed Lord has said to many a weeping mother when holding her child, whether in life or in death. And thus we can understand the words of the mother of Sarepta, and those of many a mother in like circumstances: ‘Now – thus – I know that a Man of Elohim thou, and that the Word of Jehovah in thy mouth *is* truth!’ She had learned it when first she received him; she had seen it day by day at her table; she had known it when God had answered her unspoken thought, her unuttered prayer, by showing that mercy and not judgment, love and forgiveness, not punishment and vengeance, were the highest meaning of His dealings” (Edersheim 197).