



The Widow and Elijah

1 Kings 17

There are several stories in scripture that describe how the children of Israel preferred their idols over the one true God. Even though they witnessed God's love through miracles and mercies time and again, we learn in 1 Kings 17 that the Lord was withholding rain as punishment for their disobedience.

During that time of drought, the prophet Elijah received a word from the Lord to find a widow who would care for him.

10 *So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?"* **11** *As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."*

12 *"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."*

The land and the people suffered greatly from the severe drought as water and food were scarce. The gracious widow was willing to give Elijah water, but food? That was a much bigger concern. She knew her provisions weren't enough for herself and her son, let alone another mouth to feed. She had resigned herself; they were going to die from starvation based on what remained in her cupboards. The strangers' request was irrational – even callous.

13 *Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first, make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son."* **14** *For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up, and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'*

Regardless of the customs of the day and the severity of the drought, I'm not sure I would respond with as generous a spirit to this stranger's request. This Gentile woman had no way to know that this Hebrew man was a prophet sent from God.

But somehow, his words, "...*this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says,*" pierced the widow's heart. She responded with generosity and obedience, trusting the Lord's words through Elijah.

15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. **16** For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Because of her actions – obedience and trust – the Lord provided for Elijah, the widow, and her son, too. From that day forward, the widow witnessed a miracle every day when she dipped her hands into the flour and poured oil from a jar.

But there is more to the story; the Lord has not yet finished. There were lessons still to be learned and trust to be strengthened. He had yet to flip the script.

17 Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. **18** She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”

The widow of Zarephath had a generous and obedient spirit. She trusted in the words of a stranger that his God would provide for all of them. However, when her son died, she doubted God's goodness. She assumed that God was judging her for some sin she had committed, and she blamed herself.

I can certainly relate. How about you? How often do we think God has forsaken us when we are sad, hurt, or angry? Does he hear our prayers?

Though the Lord had saved them from starvation, her child died anyway. In her grief, she lashed out at Elijah. Her son was her life. He was to have been her provider as she grew old. With him gone, she would be destitute. Miracle every day or not, she questioned: where was Elijah's God of promises now?

Having lived with this family for some time, Elijah was filled with compassion for them. He didn't try to explain the situation, but he did all he knew to do: He went straight to God—the only one who could fix this problem.

Elijah prayed boldly to God. He stretched his body out on the boy three times and asked God to restore the boy's life. The Lord heard Elijah's prayers – He flipped the script in a most miraculous way. The boy was brought back to life.

23 Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!”

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.”

God used the experience of the drought to teach Elijah and the widow to depend upon Him completely as life sustainer and life giver. Likewise, God often leads us through difficult

challenges. Maybe he dries up a resource or removes a security we rely on. His purpose is not to harm us, but to refine us – to build up our ability to trust Him more, and to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

The Lord will use unlikely people, difficult circumstances, and incomprehensible resources to achieve His purposes. Like the widow, let us seek Him with a generous and obedient spirit. Like Elijah, let us commit to God's word, trusting in His promises, for it is faith and faith alone that will give us God's holy rest.

###

Study Questions

- How might you respond to an irrational request by God, like sharing your food with a stranger during a drought?
- What do these daily miracles indicate about the character of God?
- How did the widow's perception of Elijah change as the story unfolded?
- How does the story of the widow's son illustrate the power of faith? Of intercessory prayer?
- Why do you think God flipped the script in this resurrection story?
- In what ways can you relate to Elijah's faith in God to your own circumstances?

Further Study

This story of bringing a person back to life reminds me of the story of Lazarus and how his friend Jesus restored life to him. You can read about this miracle in John 11:1-44 and consider the comparisons.