



## Elijah Series #3 “Lessons at Zarephath”

### Introduction

Observing God’s interaction with Elijah and Elijah’s spiritual journey in his day provides insight and principles for us in our day which is not unlike what Elijah faced. The periods in Elijah’s life follow a definite instruction from the Lord.

*“And the word of the Lord came to Elijah”*

### I. Lessons from the Palace where Elijah boldly announced God’s judgment for sin. 1 Kings 17:1

*God is more interested in backbone than background.*

*God speaks to and through people.*

*Know your God*

*Know your standing with God.*

*Know your purpose in life*

*Earnest prayer is inseparable from all aspects of God’s work.*

### II. Lessons from the brook where Elijah learned to trust God in obscurity and isolation. 1 King 17:2-7

God hid Elijah by the brook where he learned to trust God in isolation and obscurity.

*He learned*

*...to wait for God’s specific directions.*

*...that God doesn’t always lay out the whole plan at once.*

*...that God often uses isolation and obscurity to bring about His plan.*

*...that when God prescribes, God provides.*

*... that God’s commands require man’s compliance.*

*... to be open to every source God may use to provide.*

*... that God usually provides only what is needed for the moment.*

*... to endure the discomfort of unanswered prayer.*

*... that God sometimes dries up resources to bring new direction.*

We last left Elijah facing trying to squeeze water from a dried up brook.

*And it happened after a while, that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. 1 Kings 17:7*

God directed him to hid himself from Ahab in the safety of isolation and obscurity.

God promised to protect and provide for Elijah by natural and supernatural means.

Now, due to Elijah’s own drought producing prayer, his water source dried up.

This wouldn’t be the first time a God follower would run out of water in a desert.

Now what? Has God left me? “God you said you would provide water from the brook and now it has dried up.

### III. Lessons from Zarephath where Elijah learned to trust God in ministry 17:8-24

#### A. God revealed a new direction

*Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah, saying, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." 1 Kings 17:8-9*

Then word of the Lord again came to Elijah precipitating another move.

It does not seem any more logical than hiding out by the brook and depending on ravens. God instructed him to go live in a dangerous place; a city near Jezebel's home town Sidon. (See Map) Jezebel dispatched a search parties throughout the land to find and capture Elijah. It would seem anywhere near Jezebel's home town would be the last place God would send. Just as God many times hid Jesus in plain view, I think that God protected Elijah in plain view. God's new provision would come from another improbably source. God chose to use a dirt poor pagan widow at the end of her resources to provide for Elijah.

## **B. Elijah promptly obeyed the new direction**

*So he went to Zarephath.*

Zarephath means "smelting and refining metal." He goes from a "cutting place" to a place of refining. Elijah didn't argue, he simply followed God's new direction.

## **C. God orchestrated a prearranged divine encounter with a widow**

### **1. The Encounter**

*As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?" As she was going to get it, he called to her, "Bring me a bite of bread, too."*

God didn't waste any time. The widow was already there out in plain view at the exact time Elijah arrived in town. Elijah didn't have to search for this mysterious divinely-appointed widow. God even calculated how long it would take Elijah to get there and what time the woman would be there in order to bring them together. It doesn't pay to delay obedience. What if Elijah just hung out for another day or even a couple of hours? He would have missed his "connecting flight".

Zarephath was a town on the Mediterranean seacoast just south of Sidon. It was a 100 plus mile journey from the dried up brook Cherith. The drought was in full swing. Most likely, Elijah's face had already appeared on Samaria's most wanted program. God directed him into hostile territory to secure support from a helpless destitute pagan widow.

### **2. The Widow's fear**

*But she said, "I swear by the LORD your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die."*

Not only due to location but conversation we know that this woman was a pagan, perhaps a Baal worshipper. She must have had some knowledge because she referenced "Yahweh, your God." Seems like everyone is familiar with Yahweh – Elohim. She is afraid for her life. Her supplies are about to run out and this servant of Yahweh is asking her to share.

### **3. Elijah's promise from God**

*But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!"*

### **4. The Widow's obedience**

*So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her son continued to eat for many days.*

### **5. Yahweh's miraculous provision**

*There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.*

### **Possible Timeless principle at Zarephath #1**

#### *God may direct us to a different ministry*

There are seasons in life. We are members of His ministry team and He many have someone only we can reach. Think of Philip extracted from a “happening” revival to present the gospel to a single individual in the desert. Think of the Israelites instructed to temporarily suspend the Jericho invasion to minister to the one woman in the whole city who exhibited faith in the one true God. That ministry may include someone different and unfamiliar.

#### **Pondering Application**

Are you hanging on to a ministry just because you have been doing it forever?  
Does God want to bring someone else with different vision?  
Does God need your heart in some other capacity?  
Take some time to evaluate what you are doing with a listening ear and attentive eye.  
Has the brook dried up?

### **Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #2**

#### *God sometimes links His powerful provision to our prompt obedience.*

Just as the water and food from the ravens was only available in the place God commanded it, God’s provision of food and water was only available from the appointed widow. This makes obedience essential. Ponder the promise of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. God told them to wait in Jerusalem. What if they had chosen to hold up in Bethany? Be at the **right** place at the **right** time to do the **right** thing.

God orchestrates impeccable timing even though He lives outside of time. He is a just at the right time kind of God.

#### **Pondering Application**

Is there anything God has prompted you to do that you keep putting off?  
Can you think of any incidences where you missed a blessing because you put something off?  
Procrastination can often end up costing more than just the loss of blessing.

### **Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #3**

#### *God uses unlikely sources to meet present need*

First it is unclean ravens. Now it is a completely destitute Baal worshipping widow and her only son. How God commanded the widow to be there or the fact she would be housing Elijah I don’t know but we know that God told Elijah “I have commanded a widow to provide for you.” Don’t overlook God’s provision. It may come from some totally illogical or unexpected source.

#### **Pondering Application**

I encourage you to look and think outside the box.  
Have you ever said you couldn’t do something because you didn’t think you had the resources?  
Have you ever not given to a cause because of lack of resources? Maybe God wants to surprise you.  
Not all unexpected “windfalls” are for OUR benefit.

### **Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #4**

### ***Ministry can be costly***

Elijah asked the widow to share the last of her resources. Just as Elijah's water supply dried up, the widow's food supply was about to expire. She actually expected her and her son to starve to death in the coming days. Yet Elijah asks her to include him in her "last supper." This encounter was as much for the widow as it was for Elijah. God may ask us to give out of our poverty not our prosperity.

*And Jesus saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on." Luke 21:2-4*

*Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. 2 Corinthians 8:1-3*

Sometimes ministry threatens to exhaust the last of our physical and emotional resources.

#### **Pondering Application**

Are there times when you don't get involved because you don't think you have physical or financial resources? Perhaps you don't want to expend the energy. Too often we become self-focuses. The reality is that OUR stuff could swallow every bit of energy we have. Somewhere along the line we must become others-focused. Being involved in the lives of others (ministry) does cost. If it doesn't then it probably isn't having much eternal impact. Is there something or someone God is prompting you to invest in? Listen!

#### **Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #5**

***God's supernatural provision begins where our natural resources end.***

So many people express their desire to give when they have an abundance. When we agree to give our first

#### **Pondering Application**

Many talk about tithing which has traditionally meant giving God 10% of your income.

I believe the New Testament principle is at its bare minimum regular giving according to what God puts in your heart. There is also a case for sacrificial and proportional.

If that isn't your practice, consider something regular as opposed to nothing.

Also I encourage everyone to try an experiment.

Agree on some amount that you will believe God to provide to give to the Alliance Great Commission Fund by the end of the month. This would be an amount that God provides OVER AND ABOVE your normal income and budget. You are only pledging to give what God provides. Have fun with it.

**I will believe God to provide \$ \_\_\_\_\_ by the end of May to give to the GCF.**

fruits and possible our last fruits, God somehow stretches what we have. Seek first the kingdom of God and He will take care of the rest. God rebukes the devourer. God brings surprising resources.

#### **Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #6**

***Faith in God's promise leads us to give beyond our ability.***

Elijah promised the widow that God would supernaturally reward her generosity. He made the promise based on his knowledge of God and the promise of God to provide through this impoverished widow. If that is what God promised Elijah, Elijah could promise God would supply her so she could provide for him.

*Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!"*

Elijah again acknowledged the LORD God. Elijah made sure she understood that the promise came from God NOT him. Imagine – a continuous supply of oil and bread. Why didn't God provide supernaturally for Elijah by the brook? Why use the last bit of provisions of the widow? The woman was drawn to abandon Baal and trust in the true God. This was a prelude for the showdown at the Carmel Corral. Here in living color we see the principle of seeking first the kingdom of God. If she seeks God and His kingdom first He will supply what is needed. Malachi called the people to test God in this principle of giving to God first.

### **Pondering Application**

Are there any promises of God that you can think of that would motivate greater giving?

i.e. Seek first the Kingdom of God

What would motivate you to risk greater giving to God?

### **Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #7**

*God's supernatural provision is for a time and purpose not permanent*

Just as God suspended the manna the day the Israelites touched foot in the Promised Land this divinely-directed supply would cease after the draught ended.

#### **D. God tested the faith of Elijah AND the widow 1 Kings 17:17-24**

##### **1. Tragedy struck**

*Sometime later the woman's son became sick. He grew worse and worse, and finally he died.*

Too often we get used to ease and comfort. This little prophet refuge had all they needed; shelter and an inexhaustible food source. What a blessed home! Now tragedy strikes like it does to every home.

##### **2. Questions arose**

*Then she said to Elijah, "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to point out my sins and kill my son?" But Elijah replied, "Give me your son." And he took the child's body from her arms, carried him up the stairs to the room where he was staying, and laid the body on his bed. Then Elijah cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, why have you brought tragedy to this widow who has opened her home to me, causing her son to die?"*

The widow immediately assumed her tragic loss was due to Elijah's presence. Perhaps Baal was responsible. The reality is that she and her son were actually alive because of Elijah's presence. (Remember the "last Supper"). The natural assumption is that tragedy is the result of sin. I don't know what sins the widow had in mind but she obviously did some introspection. Elijah has something to learn here also. He assumes some sort of punishment at play. God always seems to get blamed for tragedy. Why did God allow this?

##### **3. God intervened through Elijah's persistent prayer**

*And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, please let this child's life return to him." The LORD heard Elijah's prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he revived! Then Elijah brought him down from the upper room and gave him to his mother. "Look!" he said. "Your son is alive!"*

Here again we find that the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. God enlisted Elijah into the limited ranks of those who raised dead people to life. In this case, Elijah demonstrated the power of persistent prayer.

#### 4. Faith matured

*Then the woman told Elijah, "Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the LORD truly speaks through you."*

As a result of this miraculous act, the woman's faith grew. She trusted some before but seemed to have experienced a deepened trust. It doesn't say, but I can't help but think that this incident didn't hurt Elijah's faith. He progressed from a bold request that God stop the rain to return a dead child's life to calling down fire from heaven to restoring rain after three and a half years.

#### **Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #8**

*God allows tough times to develop tough faith.*

Sometimes God uses tragedy for a greater display of His glory. Think Jesus waiting till Lazarus' sickness to kill him before responding to the call for help.

*"This sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified in it." John 11:4*

Both the widow and Elijah questioned God in a time of tragedy. This incident ended up developing a greater faith in God and His promise.

*Then the woman told Elijah, "Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the LORD truly speaks through you."*

God can but doesn't always eliminate everyone's suffering. Children die. Tragedy strikes. Paul pointed out that even though we don't see it now, God weaves all of the good and evil in our world for His glory and our ultimate good. Jesus used this example to demonstrate that God doesn't always eliminate tragedy for now.

*But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. Luke 4:25-26*

The people became enraged and drove Jesus out of the city. Somehow there are many who mistakenly believe that God has an obligation to eliminate all evil and suffering so that we can live a comfortable life in spite of our corrupt choices. These same people are ready to cast the True Jesus out of their thinking. Remember, godly responses to tribulation produces maturity.

#### **Pondering Application**

What are you facing in your life that could be an opportunity to strengthen your faith in God?

Is there a different way to look at the negative things in your life to see the possibility of glorifying God?

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4*

*Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5*

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-13*

**Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #9**

*Tragedy stirs introspection*

The first thing that come to mind at the death of her son is her own sinfulness. What did I do to bring this on? Who do I trust? Elijah had nothing to say from God about the woman's sin. Tragedy is not always connected to some judgment of God. There are certainly consequences to sin we should never ignore. God may just be strengthening our faith. Tragedy simply may come because we live in a broken world that includes suffering.

**Pondering Application**

Not all negative events in our life are due to something we did or DID'T do. However, some are. Can you trace some of the things that are not difficult to some activity on your part. It is always good to evaluate our relationship with God.

**Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #10**

*God accomplishes multiple purposes by single events*

*Our obedience is someone else's blessing*

This single event accomplishes a number of things. It provided for Elijah's needs. It provided for the needs of the widow and her son. It strengthened faith both in Elijah and the widow. God uses us in other people's lives. If we miss His direction, they miss His blessing.

**Pondering Application**

Take some time to ponder how things in your life are linked to other things or people. Your abundance may be to meet someone else's poverty. Your need may be to bring blessing to someone God commanded to provide. How will this cause you to think differently about what God is possibly doing on a larger scale.

**Possible timeless principle at Zarephath #11**

*Pray persistently*

Elijah didn't stop at one prayer.

He kept crying out to God on behalf of the widow until God answered.

Even though he questioned what God was doing, he asked anyway.

Later, we will spend some more time on the power of prayer as we continue to see Elijah's persistence in prayer.

**Pondering Application**

This is a simple application. What place does intercessory prayer for others have in my daily routine? Take some time to talk to God about your feelings and attitudes toward such prayer.