



ELIJAH

WEEK 2 STUDY GUIDE





ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW

After God calls Elijah to speak boldly against Ahab and Jezebel, he calls him to live stranded in the desert being cared for by the birds and drinking from a stream. Unfortunately, even though Elijah has been faithful, he is still impacted by the drought. The stream God has been using to care provide for Elijah dries up as the drought goes on. Elijah is then led by God to another place. There he will be cared for but he will also care for others.

1 Kings 17:8-24

The Widow of Zarephath

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him, **9** “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” **10** So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” **11** And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” **12** And she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” **13** And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. **14** For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.’” **15** And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. **16** The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Elijah Raises the Widow's Son

17 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. **18** And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” **19** And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. **20** And he cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?” **21** Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, let this child's life[a] come into him again.” **22** And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. **23** And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” **24** And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.”



DEVOTIONAL 1: CHOOSING TO SUFFER

Elijah found himself in the desert, trusting God to provide through the stream and through the birds delivery of meals. Yet, for Elijah, at any given time he could have ended the drought in order to get the water he desperately needed. Elijah's proclamation in the first few verses said this,

“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these yes, except by my word.”

This tells us that at any given time Elijah could have called it on the drought and taken care of his needs. He could have brought rain down and no longer worried about his personal provision. He chose to go through that to help accomplish God's will.

What gets even worse is that in verse 7 we see that the stream Elijah has been relying on dries up and God calls him, in the middle of a drought, to travel again to another place to find mystery provision again. God's only response and answer to the dried up stream in 1 kings 17:8 is,

“ Arise, go to Zarephath which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.”

Elijah had been living on the stream and when that disappeared God didn't tell Elijah to go ahead and make it rain, he told him to go on a lengthy journey to another country and once he arrive he would be cared for by an unnamed widow. Why did he not call in the rain right here? Why did he not just give in and take care of his own needs in this moment? Was it God's plan for him to go without like that? Was he really expected to just continue on in the face of such hardships? The short answer, yes.

Waiting in another country was a widow. Her son would grow ill. He would pass away. Even the woman thought it was hopeless and that all was lost. Yet God called Elijah in the middle of a drought to live with a poor widow and at the end of their encounter Elijah was able to weep before God and bring the boy back to life. None of those things would have been possible if Elijah had made it rain when he was in need. None of those things would have been possible if Elijah did not travel to a foreign land out of his comfort zone. None of that would have happened if Elijah had taken the circumstances at face value. God is not the author of evil. Nor does he orchestrate the evil in our lives. This fallen world and our own sinful choices do that. The beauty of God's sovereignty is that in the midst of all this evil God still promises to make all things work together for good. He promises, and shows example in scripture where others might mean it for evil, but God works things together for good (Joseph in Genesis).

What ever circumstance we find ourselves in we're called to follow Jesus. There are times when it seems like it would be perfectly understandable and completely rational to go another way, but we weren't called to follow when it felt right or when it made sense or when we liked it. We were called to follow in all circumstances knowing he was in control. It's what encouraged the Psalmist to write,

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies you annoying my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

No matter the circumstances; a lost job, a seeming injustice, a loved one passing away, a bad diagnosis, we can always trust him. Even in when I am surrounded by the enemies on all sides, in the middle of the valley of the shadow of death, if he prepares a place for me I shall not want. I shall be comforted by him.



DEVOTIONAL 2: THE ENEMIES LAND.

Interestingly enough the author of this text gives us one important detail to where Elijah was to meet this widow who would care for him and help him.

“Go to Zapheth, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold I have commanded a widow there to feed you.”

If we remember back to week 1 and chapter 16, we’re told that Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Sidonians. Jezebel was the one who brought in the worship of Baal to Israel. She was the influence that pushed for its prominence in the kingdom. We see later that it was her hand pushing for the persecution and elimination of true prophets in Israel. And the place God tells Elijah to run to in the midst of his needs is none other than Zapheth. And the authors adds, just in case you weren’t already aware, Zapheth belongs to Sidon or the Sidonians. God tells Elijah, in the midst of a famine aimed at dethroning the false god Baal, whose people are the Sidonians; go live among the Sidonians and I will provide for you.

If God making a drought was not enough to insult the false gods and their claim to power, God now, in the midst of this drought sends his prophet there to the peoples land so as they too suffer through this drought, God can provide for the faithful, through one of their own widows.

Widows weren’t always taken care of well in the time and place we’re discussing. Especially with having a child, this particular widow would have been very hard pressed to find a good life for herself in Zepheth. There were only a few ways to provide for yourself and none of them were glamorous. Most of them were degrading. Some were outright disgusting. Widows in most of the world except for Israel were not treated very well. There is even evidence in scripture that Israel did not always follow this command well. So God uses the rest of the world forgotten people to care for his faithful and fulfill his plan.

Can you image if Elijah had pushed back about where he was being sent? Its not unheard of in the Bible for a prophet to do so. Moses tried to talk God out of it. When he was called, he told God that he wasn’t one to speak and God must have been mistaken. When God called Jonah to Nineveh, he literally ran the other direction and required crazy storms, a whale style taxis, and sever conviction to go fulfill his purpose. After the fact he actually wept that Nineveh repented because he wanted to see them punished. So a prophet fighting back against God’s calling to go into a strange land of the god’s he was currently beefing with would not have been ridiculous.

Yet Elijah goes the course. He meets the widow in Zapheth, and he saves her life. She was down to her last meal. She expect to eat, feed her son, and die of starvation in the famine. Yet God, through Elijah, miraculously provides.

Let me ask you a simple question. What miracles might God be trying to work in someone else’s life through you? And what kind of ugly might it cause you to walk into? Are you willing to go? Are you willing to listen to What God has for you and walk the path laid out? This path will find resistance. It will be into messy places. But to reach the broken we’ve got to be willing to be with the broken. To shine brightly we’ve got to go into the darkness. Elijah went into the enemies territory, to highlight God’s provision and glory.



DEVOTIONAL 3: IT TOOK HOW LONG?

Probably the craziest part of this text to me is the last sentence by the widow that Elijah has been helping.

To remind you of the events that lead up to it, she was introduced as a widow, in a terrible nation, in the middle of famine, who ultimately planned to make her last meal and let her and her son starve to death because that was the only option. In a strange turn of events, Elijah requests she make him something to eat instead (from her last meal) and fetch him some water. In the unthinkable the woman agrees and through miraculous means the widow, her son, and Elijah are all fed from the little she had left. In a Jesus-style loaves and fishes miracle, Elijah feeds them all for years from what was barely enough to be their last meal.

After her son falls ill and dies and Elijah brings him back to life she somberly says,

“Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.”

This just absolutely floors me. She knew about the famine and proclamation he made about it. Shakey, but still insane. She saw years of provision by miraculous means after that and was taken care of throughout famine, ultimately saving her and her son's lives, and she still didn't really believe.

I think in our lives we encounter people like this all the time. We meet people who have been around faith and know something about Jesus, but have still not decided to follow him. They say things like “I'm not there yet” or “If only I could see and then I would believe.” They're the people who want to talk about tragedies, God's justice and other philosophical questions.

They're the people we often think the least about sharing our faith with and people we wouldn't always consider the recipient of a faith conversation. This woman had seen God's work as he nourished them all for years. She still didn't believe. After years and after multiple events, and after spending so much time with a “man of God” she would finally accept. She would acknowledge the true and living God and the role Elijah played in that story.

There may be people in your life you've written off from faith. They wouldn't want to hear. They would never come. They have no desire. All this because the past has proven it. Yet, in the midst of this we're given a story of a woman who took forever to believe, but finally God worked and she did.

Who has God put in your life? Who are you around for a reason? Spend time this week looking for the people you may have considered the least likely to answer and ask God what you can do to be a “man of God” in their life.