

Widow of Zarephath

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There are two widows in the Bible who gave their all to God. In Luke 21 Christ pointed to a poor widow in the temple who had just given God the last piece of money that she had. We aren't told what happened to that widow. All we know is that God noticed, God cared, and God valued her gift. That's enough for me to know with a certainty that God took care of her even though we don't know the rest of the story. He gives so many promises to widows and orphans.

Today's story is the Old Testament version of the widow's mite - where a woman gives the very last thing that might hold her body and soul together. She gives it to God. And thankfully we do have the rest of *this* story. And I think it is a wonderful story that showcases God's providence, judgment, mercy, grace, missions, care, kindness, and other attributes.

Background of lost missions

Unlike the widow in Luke 21, this widow was a Gentile in a foreign land. This shows that God has always had a heart for missions. Many people misunderstand this point because there was a different method for missions in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. Israel was deliberately positioned on the map so that all nations would have to travel past it or through it for trade. And as the crossroads for the nations, God called Israel to be a priest to the nations and act as a magnet to draw the nations in; making them jealous of the Gospel. In George W. Peter's book, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, he calls Old Testament missions centripetal missions (where the world was supposed to be drawn into Israel) and in the New Testament we have centrifugal missions where the church is slung out into the far regions of the globe. But missions was always intended to be a central feature of Biblical religion.

Here's the problem: there was nothing in Israel for the world to be jealous of. The magnetic attraction of God's law and grace were not present. In the book of Kings we see that Israel had completely lost its heart for the Gospel of grace and as a result had lost its heart for missions. But since no person and no nation can ever remain neutral, paganism began to missionize Israel. Either we are invading the world or the world is invading us. In chapters 13-16 the world began invading Israel more and more - much like the church of today is taking on the characteristics of the world. King Ahab married a woman from the region that this widow is living in (Sidon) and Jezebel had brought the missionary prophets of Baal into Israel and used those prophets to transform Israel into a thoroughly pagan state. Ahab even made true Christianity illegal and hunted down and killing the true prophets. The king of Israel was not a good guy. Look at chapter 16, verse 33.

33 And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

This woman was a Gentile (v. 9a; Luke 4:25-26)

So when Elijah left Israel, it showed two things. It showed that God was abandoning Israel. But secondly, it showed that He still had a missions heart. He sought and saved a Gentile widow. Missions accompanied Elijah wherever he went.

Zarephath was in the heart of Baal worshiping Phoenicia

Verse 8 says,

1Kings 17:8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 9 “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there.

Sidon was where Queen Jezebel was from. And Zarephath was at the heart of the Baal worshiping idolatry. So God was invading the Phoenician country with His missionary agent.

God’s war against Baalism (vv. 1-7) extended all the way to Phoenicia (vv. 8-16)

But I think it is also important to see that God (through Elijah) declared war upon all those who served this false god - whether they were in Israel or in Phoenicia. It shows once again that there can be no neutrality; we are either in submission to God or we are automatically enemies of God.

Let me give background to what is going on here. Baal was supposed to be the god of rain, fertility, and crop productivity. The Phoenicians would claim that Baal was gone on vacation to the underworld when the rains would stop or when drought would hit. Well, that theory was about to be proven wrong in chapters 17-18. After three and a half years of zero rain or even dew, it would look like Baal was more than just gone on vacation. He was dead. He was powerless. He was a fake. He would be proved to be a false god. And the contest between the prophets of Baal and the true prophet of Yehowah on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18 would be the climax of this war against Baalism. But the war had already started in the first verses of this chapter. Chapter 17, verses 1-7 make it clear that Yehowah alone brings rain and He alone brings drought. All of nature is dependent upon Him. It says,

1Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.” [That is a slap in the face of Ahab’s God, Baal, who claimed to have authority over rain. Verse 2:] 2 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 3 “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 4 And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” 5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. 7 And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

That little section all by itself is worth a sermon, but I will only mention that this drought was a judgment brought against Ahab and Jezebel. It was brought to show the powerlessness of the Phoenician god that Jezebel and Ahab worshiped - the god Baal. Since

they claimed that their god controlled the weather, Elijah said that no one would receive rain or even dew until *Yehowah* gave it. And in chapter 18 at Mount Carmel, the true God gets all the glory as He declares war on the prophets of Baal and as He brings what their prophets could not - rain. It's a marvelous story.

God's sovereign grace would invade the heart of Baal worshipping Phoenicia and draw the elect to Himself (v. 9a)

But the same writer of *this* story about the widow wants to make clear that this drought did not only affect Israel - it affected Phoenicia and the heart of Baal worship. God is attacking the throne of Baal worship. And of course, all the citizens of Phoenicia suffer because of their connection with the religion of the nation. We Christians are not exempt from suffering when America abandons God. Citizens have a covenantal connection with the nation, and when a nation comes under judgment everyone suffers. That's the bad news for you and me.

Here's the good news for you and me: God can protect His elect even in a nation that is suffering judgments. It is true that this lady was not yet a believer. But since she was elect, God would need to keep her from dying before she heard the Gospel. She would suffer with the nation, but she would not die. Thus far, God had provided for her adequately, but her resources were about to run out.

And even that has an application for today. We can be confident that God's elect will always be preserved until they can hear the Gospel. Indeed, the very judgments that condemn the non-elect are often used by God to prepare the elect to bow before Him. Theologians call those redemptive judgments. They don't redeem the non-elect. In fact, the non-elect will continue to curse God. But when God prepares the hearts of His elect, they see these judgments as proof that what they previously trusted in has let them down. Those judgments were destroying their idols and motivating the elect to relinquish trust in those things in order to put their trust in the true God. So even tough times have redemptive purposes. We ought not to be discouraged if America goes through astoundingly tough times. He will use those tough times to redeem the elect and cause them to grow strong in Him - just like this widow.

This miracle will prove that Yehowah can accomplish what Baal cannot even on Baal's own turf

If you read very many commentaries on 1 Kings you will see them saying that the writer of this book is making the same theological statement that he made earlier. Theologically, this miracle in Zarephath would demonstrate that Yehowah can accomplish what Baal cannot - and will do so on Baal's own turf. It is a powerful story to illustrate God's lordship over all the earth. He is not just the Lord of Israel.

Since Jezebel was from Sidon, this also shows Yehowah's greater power than Jezebel's prophets had

And since Queen Jezebel was from Sidon, and since she worshiped Baal, and set up Baal's prophets to be her prophets, this story will demonstrate that Yehowah has greater power than Jezebel's prophets or gods. So enough said on that.

But we will see that the widow of Zarephath illustrates beautifully God's sovereign grace, His provision, His miraculous power, and His love. But it also illustrates how faith is tested by trials.

God prepared the woman to be receptive of Elijah (v. 9b)

So far God has been providing for Elijah in rather unusual ways - commanding ravens to feed him. Now God will have an even more unlikely source of provision - a poverty-stricken widow who is herself starving. That this widow came to trust God can be seen from Christ's brief commentary in Luke 4. But there is division of opinion on *how* and *when* she came to believe. Did it happen in verse 9? Or did she come to believe in the true God at a later time? In verse 9 God tells Elijah, "See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

You might think that settles the question, but it doesn't. There are differences of opinion on what that means. Here's the question. How did God command the widow? Some believe that He spoke to her via some form of revelation - such as a dream, a vision, or through the words of some other prophet. And there were still other prophets around. That's what I tend to believe. Other commentaries say that God's command doesn't refer to revelation at all. Instead, it refers to providence - just as in verse 4, where God commands the ravens to feed Elijah. He just providentially makes the ravens *want* to feed Elijah - no revelation.

Either way would be remarkable. If God simply moved her heart providentially to be willing to give away her last morsel of food and to believe that Yehowah was the true God, that providence would be remarkable. And we can trust God's providence to prepare the way for the elect to believe today as well. But in this passage there seems to be more than providence at work. In verse 12 *she already knows the name of Yehowah*. How did she know that name before Elijah came? Secondly, *she knows that Yehowah is the true God* and she is willing to stake her life upon that fact with a vow. Since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, it seems to imply that she had previous revelation. So I tend to side with the minority of commentators who say that God did indeed give her some form of revelation before Elijah came - perhaps a vision, a dream, or the words of a prophet. And when Elijah shows up, she is somewhat prepared to do what she did.

But either way you interpret the passage, God prepared her to not do what was natural. What was natural would be to keep the food for herself and for her son. They were starving, after all. But she goes against all natural impulses and gives the prophet her last morsel of food. Either way, this is a remarkable action.

Two tests of faith (vv. 10-11)

And actually, in verses 10-11 we have *two* tests of faith, not just one. Keep in mind that water was scarce for her too and that she only has enough food for one meal. Verse 10:

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." 11 And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

She probably has very little strength left if she thinks that she and her son are on the verge of death. But rather than giving up, she gathers sticks to cook her last meal. I love that about her. She does not passively give up simply because things look hopeless. She does what she is able to do. She doesn't scarf down her flour without cooking it. Even though starving and hungry, she has the patience to cook the food. We must do what we can with the little resources that we have and leave the results in God's hand.

She also shows hospitality and care for another human being when everything in her would be crying out to focus only on herself and her son. She immediately goes to fetch him some water. I think that is so cool. All by itself that shows self-sacrifice. She is serving even though she believes she is close to dying. But then comes the second test of her faith - he asks for a bit of bread. This is really asking for the widow's mite. And at that point she *does* explain her poverty to him.

1Kings 17:12 So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, 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."

So she explains that she doesn't have bread yet, and that she was planning to go to prepare isn't much. And based on Elijah's next words, perhaps even a bit of fear creeps in. But it is not enough fear to evaporate her faith. She has enough faith to say with conviction that Yehowah does indeed live. Anytime LORD is in all capital letters, it is Yehowah, the covenant name for Israel. So when she says, "As the LORD your God lives," she is saying, "As Yehowah your God lives." This is a powerful profession of faith in Yehowah rather than in Baal. She is not an Israelite yet, but she knows that Yehowah lives and is the true God. How did she find out about Yehowah? That would not have been a name that would be universally known. It is one of the reasons that I suspect that God revealed himself to her and gave her a literal command via revelation in verse 9. But either way, she believes in Yehowah. Verse 13:

1Kings 17:13 And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the LORD God of Israel: "The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth."

When he says, "Do not fear," it implies that she had fear that was to some degree fighting with her faith. Fear and faith are incompatible, and we must put off fear. Fear is a deadly enemy of the Christian- unless it is fear of God.

When he asked her to make a cake for him first and then for herself and her son, he was challenging and testing her faith. She only has a handful of flour. That's enough to make one

cake. But he is asking her to use that to make a cake for him and then to go back and make a cake for the two of them. This is a call for faith. And that she did exactly as he said is proof positive that she was a woman of faith. If she had not been a believer, it would have been very difficult to believe that this was even possible. Verses 15-16 show that she had simple faith in God's Word.

1Kings 17:15 So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.

That phrase, "according to the word of the LORD which He spoke," is a regular drum-beat throughout this book. If God makes a promise, He fulfills His promise. It doesn't matter how impossible that promise may seem to be, men and women of faith will believe the promises of God.

Here is question: Is this a one-time-in-history never-to-be-repeated miracle? Jesus seems to imply the opposite in Luke 4. Jesus used this very story to rebuke the Jews of His day for failing to have faith in God's provision for their present day and for failing to receive Jesus. Likewise Paul tells the Philippians (who were also acting like the widow and giving out of poverty), "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul applies Old Testament miraculous stories of provision to their own circumstances and says,

2Cor. 9:6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." 10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, 11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

Paul is saying that the central principle of God's provision of the miraculous manna is not that God will give manna today, but that God will provide for our needs just as surely today. And there are a number of applications that we can take from this beautiful story.

Applications

God continues to be the God of provision for His people in need

First, God continues to be the God of miraculous provision to those who are expendable for Him. Kathy and I can tell you of numerous times when God came through for us as we gave our all. In our first church we lived on fumes. We had bills that needed a few more cents for us to be able to pay them. And as we looked under sofas and under our car seats, we came up with exactly the right amount. Maybe one of you contributed those quarters, nickels, and pennies when you sat in our sofas. Who knows? We would need to go on a trip where our cloth diapers wouldn't be able to be washed, but we had no money for disposable diapers. So we prayed for God's provision and had a number of disposable diaper samples would show up in our mail box - just enough. One time, when we had prepared enough meat for 50 people, 100 showed up. We prayed in faith that God would multiply the potatoes and the

roast and not only did all 100 get very generous second helpings, we had plenty of leftovers for our other guests to eat during the next week. It was very literally an astonishing multiplying of the meat and potatoes. And actually, Kathy can tell you of that happening more than once. It made no mathematical sense. Indeed, our first few years in this church had money flowing through our hands and out into the kingdom that made no sense, other than that our God continues to be a God who multiplies the oil, the flour, the loaves, and the fishes. When you are sold out to God, He proves Himself to be a generous God. He's not just the God of Elijah. He continues to be the God of the widow, and you, and me.

God expects us to do what we can

But God does expect us to do what we can - just as this woman gathered sticks, lit fires, mixed dough, cooked it, sliced it, and served it. God does not bless laziness, lack of planning, or irresponsibility. He expects us to use all the means that He puts into our power. And I think this lady is a great example of the responsible diligence of true faith. Though God loves to bless the needy who are willing to give their last mite, He does not bless laziness or irresponsibility.

God's blessings may be frugal

Another application that I see is that God's blessings may sometimes seem too frugal, even though they are adequate. God didn't provide salad, steak, and lobster to Elijah and this woman (not that they could eat lobster). But the point is that I don't see them complaining at all about the fact that He multiplied only what they had - oil and flour for the months (or more probably for the years) that he stayed there. The text seems to imply that this was all that they ate for a long time - bread made from oil, flour, and water. Which means that you can live on wheat and oil if you absolutely have to. Our bodies are designed to be able to live on a lot less than what most of us think they can. This is not a license to eat poorly or eat donuts three times a day or only store up wheat, but it is a caution to not fear if God puts you into a poverty stricken circumstance where you won't have the vitamins, minerals, or other nutrition that you are used to having. With God's blessing you can do fine on a lot less than you currently have. So again, this is not an excuse for irresponsible planning, but if everything else gets confiscated, you can trust God with your little.

This story reveals 8 more things about God's character and work

But this story reveals 8 more things about God's character and work that are not in your outlines. Let me quickly cover them.

It reveals the mercy of God. God's mercies were withdrawn from faithless Israel. He had been merciful for a long time after they had abandoned Him just as God's mercies continue to be bestowed on America long after it has abandoned Him. God had also sent prophets to them over and over giving them a chance to repent. That's mercy. But when Israel rejected that mercy, He moved His mercy to this Gentile widow. And when Christ highlights the sovereign mercy of God in this story in Luke chapter 4, the Jews were filled with wrath and pushed him out of the synagogue, out of the city, and tried to throw Him off a cliff. They didn't like the implication that God has the right to bestow mercy on whom He will and the

right to withdraw mercy from anyone. His mercy is sovereign mercy. As He says in Romans 9,

“I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”... Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He will He hardens. (vv. 15,18)

Sovereign mercy is written all over this story.

Second, the omniscience of God can be seen. God showed Elijah about the future. The future is only known to God, but He knows all things. He is never blindsided by anything. God knows all things possible because He knows what He is able to do and He knows all things actual because He has decreed all things and His providence carries out those decrees.

Third, this story shows His omnipresence. In verse 1 God had told Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand.” Elijah stood before God in Israel and he stood before God in Phoenicia. Wherever he was, no matter how difficult, he knew that God was there. And God was certainly at work in both places. He was present with the ravens at the same time that He was present with this widow. God commanded both. But His presence backs up that command.

Fourth, it shows God’s omnipotence as over against the weakness of the demonic gods of the pagans and of Jezebel. Our God controls the winds, clouds, dew, rain, droughts, crops, and everything else. And it was by God’s power that the oil and flour never ran out till God said it would. In fact, in the next story God will show that He has power over death itself. He is omnipotent. And the stories of these attributes were designed to stir up our faith in Him.

Fifth, this story highlights the goodness of God. God’s goodness in rain and sun; God’s goodness in daily food; God’s goodness in providing salvation. God’s goodness to a prophet, and God’s goodness to a widow and her son. It shows God’s goodness spurned by Israel and God’s goodness received with gratefulness by a widow.

Sixth, God’s justice is highlighted as well. Neither Israel nor Phoenicia deserved rain, and withholding rain was an act of justice. When people see God’s judgments they rail against Him and blaspheme and say that such misery proves that there is no God. What it really proves is that God is different than the god of their imaginations. Our God is a God of *justice* who rightly punishes evil. And God brings real judgments in real history because of his justice.

Seventh, God is a generous God who gives and gives and gives. He gave insight to Elijah. He gave rain and sunshine to Israelites who didn’t deserve it. God gave food to this woman and her son for probably two years - two years of daily miracles. He is a generous God who gives and gives and gives.

And last, this story reveals that God is a God who answers; He answers prayer. James 5:17 says,

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Why does James use Elijah as an example of why we should pray? After all, Elijah is a super-star, isn't he? Surely God doesn't expect us to be like him! But James says that when it comes to prayer, Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed... and God answered His prayers. These stories are not simply designed to satisfy our curiosity. They were designed to stir up our prayer life and to stir up our faith.

This woman received her son to life again by faith (vv. 17-24 with Heb. 11:35)

And that is true of even Elijah's prayer that God would raise this dead son. When God gives faith, that faith will receive what it asks for. And in this situation God gave both Elijah and the woman faith to believe yet another impossible thing could happen. She starts off overwhelmed and without faith. Verses 17-24.

1Kings 17:17 Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?"

She makes a mistake that many evangelicals make today. When bad things happen to them, they often wonder, "What did I do to deserve this? Did some sin I committed make me the recipient of these troubles?" Maybe she thinks that being close to this holy man exposed her sin. Death of a loved one is an overwhelming thing to bear and sometimes it skews our judgment. But it appears that even Elijah is deeply affected by this and wonders how on earth God can repay with death such service and kindness as this woman and son have shown to him. Verse 19:

1Kings 17:19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed.

Notice how different this is from faith healers of today who make a public spectacle of every healing and try to monetize and market their healings for financial gain. He simply takes the son and in private prays and then privately brings him back to the woman. Verse 20:

20 Then he cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?" 21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him." 22 Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!" 24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth."

Hebrews 11:35 says of Old Testament saints, "through faith...Women received their dead raised to life again." Since there are only two women in the Old Testament who received their dead raised to life again - the widow of Zarephath and the lady of 2 Kings 4, and since Hebrews 11:35 speaks of *women* (in the plural), it is once again certain that this woman had faith that God would raise him from the dead - probably once Elijah took him in his

arms. That shows that she is a remarkable woman of faith. She believes God for even the impossible.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and mention that I believe that such miracles as this one are still occasionally occurring today. We cannot demand them, but the same God of miracles is at work. And I know that there will be skepticism in some minds. That's OK. You can't believe things simply because a pastor says them. You have to be captive to the Word of God. But I don't think evangelicals are captive to the Word of God on the issue of miracles. People say that signs of an apostle have passed away, so there are no more miracles. But are miracles only signs of apostles? No. Mark 16 speaks of signs also accompanying even a believer - and miracles are one of those signs.

I won't list all the temporary resurrections that I believe have actually occurred, but let me give five testimonies. The first report comes from a guy who was originally a real skeptic of these things - the fourth century theologian Augustine (who lived from 354-430 AD). He reported several cases of people who had died and been raised through prayer. One of them had been dead for four days. He was already decomposing. And he cites the witnesses. As I mentioned, he used to be skeptical of such things, but he said that these resurrections were undeniable.

Two centuries earlier, Irenaeus (he lived from 130-202 AD) gave similar reports. He said, "as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years."

There are death certificates for two others that I have read about.

But let me get personal. I personally know that my grandma was prayed back to life after she died and said that she experienced heaven. My mom can tell you that story. My sister-in-law's grandma came back to life after she was declared dead in a hospital operating room. Interestingly, in her case, she died a five-point Arminian and came back a five-point Calvinist. She said that she was thoroughly humbled at the realization of depravity of this when she left her body and instantly realized that only sovereign grace could remedy that. When my sister-in-law was a child, she was clinically dead, and even had *rigor mortis* set in. But through prayer she was raised up. Though these kinds of things are rare, there is no reason to believe that God cannot on occasion give such a foretaste of the powers of the age to come by giving a temporary coming back to life. It's not something we can demand, but it is certainly something we can rejoice in. And God may sovereignly give some people faith to believe that.

How long did Elijah stay with the widow and her son? We aren't told. He was at the brook Cherith till it dried up. If it dried up after a year and a half of no rain, that would mean that Elijah stayed in the widow's house for two years. If it took two and a half years for the brook to dry up, then he stayed with her for one year. We don't know for sure. Though based on water flow of that brook it was probably around two years.

Why did he stay there? If you look at chapter 18:10, the good man, Obadiah says,

As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, "He is not here," he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you.

Everyone was looking for Elijah to capture him and turn him over to Ahab. Ahab thought that everyone had looked in every nook and cranny. The last place they would expect him to be would be in a poor widow's house in Zarephath who on any given day only had a handful of flour. So there were strategic reasons to be there. But the main reason was to provide for this woman and her son - and probably to give Elijah a bit of a vacation.

What happened when Elijah left? Chapter 18 says that he left just before it started to rain. It says, "And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.'" James says that from chapter 17:1 to the rain in chapter 18 was three and a half years. Though we aren't told what the woman did after he left, we can assume that God continued to care for her, and between her industry and her son's industry they were able to make it.

In terms of propriety, Elijah slept on different floors from the widow. Verse 19 says that "he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed." Separate beds and separate floors. And the son's presence in the home would also guard his and her reputation.

But the most important lesson from this story is the one in the last verse in the chapter - she had certainty that God's prophetic word spoken through Elijah is truth. Verse 24 says, "I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth." Though people in those days had to test whether prophets were really from God, once they were known to be prophets, their prophetic words were always treated as the inerrant word of God. The same thing is said of the entire Scriptures - "Your Word is truth." Now that the Scriptures have been recorded for all time in the Bible, this book becomes the standard by which all truth claims are judged. There is a difference between saying that God's Word is true and saying, "God's word is the truth." Wayne Grudem said,

The difference is significant, for this statement encourages us to think of the Bible not simply as being "true" in the sense that it conforms to some higher standard of truth, but rather to think of the Bible as itself the final standard of truth. The Bible is God's Word, and God's Word is the ultimate definition of what is true and what is not true: God's Word is itself truth. Thus, we are to think of the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth, the reference point by which every other claim to truthfulness is to be measured. Those assertions that conform with Scripture are "true" while those that do not conform with Scripture are not true.

What then is truth? Truth is what God says, and we have what God says ...in the Bible.

This doctrine of the absolute truthfulness of Scripture stands in clear contrast to a common viewpoint in modern society that is often called pluralism. Pluralism is the view that every person has a perspective on truth that is just as valid as everyone else's perspective—therefore, we should not say that anyone else's religion or ethical standard is wrong. According to pluralism, we cannot know any absolute truth; we can only have our own views and perspectives...

Pluralism is one aspect of an entire contemporary view of the world called postmodernism. Postmodernism would not simply hold that we can never find absolute truth; it would say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. All attempts to claim truth for one idea or another are just the result of our own background, culture, biases, and

personal agendas (especially our desire for power). Such a view of the world is of course directly opposed to a biblical view, which sees the Bible as truth that has been given to us from God.¹

This means that our discoveries in politics, counseling, economics, education, history, science and every other endeavor of life must be considered subordinate to the Bible. Let me illustrate just using this story. If science declares that it is impossible (based on laws of science) that the oil and flour continually replenished itself, we do not question the bible. We say the Bible is true and science has made a wrong induction. And by the way, there is no such thing as a valid induction. Inductions may be useful, but they are not truth. The Bible is truth. If politicians say that it was immoral for the woman to break the law by not turning Elijah in to the Phoenician authorities, we must say that the Bible is truth and politics is not. If education experts say that the boy should have been sent to the public school rather than being kept at home, we say that the Bible is true and the NAE is false. If historians claim that we can't believe stories like this until we can verify them in secular history, we respond, "No. That is backwards. Biblical history is the only infallible and inerrant history." The point is, if we are to be faithful to God like this widow was, we must come to the place where we have implicit faith in God's words alone. May *our* hearts be held captive to the Bible. Amen.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1999), 41.