

Elijah and Elisha Class 5
1 Kings 17:17-24

Homework review: What connections did you find between this event in the life and ministry and the NT? Luke 4:25, 26 ; Luke 7:11f; Luke 8:40f; Acts 9:36f; 20:10f; Heb 11:25

Zarephath is a city that is 13 miles north of Tyre and 8 miles south of Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. It is mentioned in Assyrian records of the 7th century BC recording its surrender to Sennacharib and in Egyptian records as far back as the 13th century BC. Excavations have uncovered the ancient port which handled exports of wine, olive oil, and purple dye but also was a manufacturing center for textiles, pottery, and glassware. Baal was worshipped as the god of rain, fertility, and conqueror of death...each of which claims Yahweh through his prophet in these verses takes on and dispels.

Miracles: Elijah and Elisha are recorded as performing more miracles than any other two men in Israel's history, since their entry to the Promised Land. Elijah is recorded as performing 5 miracles and Elisha 12 miracles. These were done, like in the time of Moses, in a time of national crisis and potential deliverance. They also may have to do directly with the claims of the foreign gods, as did the 10 plagues of Moses in Exodus.

This is a fascinating study in our human struggle to understand our own lives and circumstances.

God has shown up and done far more than the woman expected...providing for her and her son as they provided for Elijah.

Now God seems to allow or causes, whichever works for you, the woman's son to sicken and then stop breathing so that he

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*dies. What is her first thought to explain this circumstance?
See verse 18.*

*Notice how Elijah prays...see verse 20. What do you observe?
Does this prayer surprise you?*

*Notice also the demand of the prophet... "Give me your son."
What greater thing can be asked of this woman? Now all she
has is his lifeless body and even that this Israelite prophet
demands!*

*Yahweh acts in response to Elijah's prayer...the child is not
raised because of Elijah's skill. Still the woman knows that
Yahweh and not Baal is god because of what God has done for
her...and Jesus reminds his neighbors in Nazareth that God did
not do this for the many widows in Israel at the time of this
drought and famine...only the widow of Zarephath. She knew
that the same god who provided the meal and oil has now
rescued her and her son again. These contests by death are
growing in intensity and God himself is showing himself directly
as the master of life and death.*

*According to a Jewish tradition, as quoted by St. Jerome, the
translator of the Latin Vulgate, the boy became the servant who
accompanied Elijah, and became the prophet Jonah.*

**One wonders how the days were spent in this home
become oasis of refuge. If they were pagans, did Elijah
spend his time telling them of the wonders of the God of
Israel...teaching them the psalms etc. Psalm 146:5ff;
Psalm 45:12f. Did God send Elijah to preach salvation
to the widow and her son? Seeing Baal unmasked for
the fraud he was, did they learn to love and serve the
Lord? How Elijah prefigures the marvelous ministry
among the Gentiles that Jesus would ordain...of which
we ourselves are the fruit. Here God sends his prophet
to speak for him and to seek and save a people from
among the Gentiles. See Acts 15:14.**

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But as this fruit is born of Elijah's ministry among the Gentiles...heartache and disappointment lie close at hand. The son dies suddenly...no warning...no preparation. It seems to the widow that her faith has been misplaced, that Elijah's god has sent him only to punish her...and to do it in the most exquisite way...having rescued and saved her son and her elevated her hopes only to crush her now with his sudden passing. What kind of God is this? This death calls into question all she thought she knew of this God of Israel. She had learned faith. She had dared to believe when suddenly her beloved son is snatched from her with no warning or preparation. Elijah is also appalled but does not show it. Rather he goes upstairs to the body and prays...not once but three times. He knew that life is the Lord's and he who had taken the boy's life was the only one who could restore it. Confronted with this evidence the woman again professes her faith in the one true God, the God of Elijah. It is important for us to see that bereavement is not necessarily a Divine judgment on any specific sin. Many of us can draw the same conclusions she did...heartache must be ~~de~~due to the sins I have committed. Perhaps not. Similarly, no amount of good works or active service will exempt us from trial. There are deep mysteries associated with God's providential dealings with his people. Of all the homes in Tyre and Sidon it would seem that this one was the one that would not experience heartache because of her faithful service to God and his prophet. Through our tears we can sometimes be blinded to the truth that a day is coming when all will be well...when all tears will be dried...when God's love and goodness is all we see. Elijah seems a man just like us...sometimes on fire with zeal for the Lord and full of confidence that God can do

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anything...that nothing is impossible for God...and still other times when he was filled with questions and doubts. He asks, Lord have you brought this evil? If so, then you can undo it. He stretched himself upon the boy three times and prayed, **Let-let** this boy live. We are reminded by James of Elijah's prayers, see James 5:17. We have several instances when Elijah prays in earnest...but perhaps none so earnest as here...the widow exclaims that Deut 18:22 is true and proves that God is true and Elijah is a true prophet.

Finally, we see glimpses of Jesus' earthly ministry and three resurrections or resuscitations and we see a glimpse of Easter and the glorious resurrection of our Lord, the beloved Son.

Homework for next week: 1 Kings 18