

Bible Study • By Faith – An In-depth look at Hebrews 11

Lesson #47 • Hebrews 11:35a

Victory Over Circumstances

“Women received their loved ones back again from death.”

• The Widow of Zarephath •

• H A N D O U T •

► This study lesson continues with those whose faith brought victory over their circumstances. Specifically, from the Hebrews 11 list: women who witnessed their loved ones being raised to life after death. Since all of the examples in the list in Hebrews 11 are from the Old Testament, there are two examples from which we could select. The one chosen for this study is the first Biblical record of someone being brought back to life: the Widow of Zarephath.

First, we need to set the stage for the story. This story is really about the prophet Elijah. **Isn't it curious that, like Joshua, Elijah is not in the list of examples of those who lived “by faith?”** But, through the Widow's story, we will at least be able to acknowledge some of Elijah's incredible journey of faith.

As the story opens, Elijah has been called by God to confront King Ahab in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Elijah was from Tishbe, east of the Jordan, but until this moment in scripture, he is unknown to us. Elijah is destined to become a biblical personality that will be almost larger than life.

Elijah announced to King Ahab that the drought, which had covered the land for the last six months, is going to continue until the Lord God Almighty said otherwise. Not only is it not going to rain, but there will be no dew; no moisture of any kind! The drought occurred because Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel, decreed that all of Israel must forsake the worship of Yahweh, on pain of death, and worship only Baal. Jezebel was the daughter of a gentile king who is devoted to Baal. Even though Israel has worshiped many different pagan gods, like the Golden Calf, Jezebel is the one who brought Baal worship to Israel when she married Ahab.

Ahab and Jezebel received the news of the drought very badly and instead of seeking a solution with Yahweh, they decide to kill Elijah, thinking that once Elijah was dead, their god, Baal, [whom they believe is in charge of the weather], will bring rain once again to Israel. The Lord thwarted their plans by having Elijah go to the Kerith Ravine where there was a Brook to give him water and the Lord promised to send Ravens with his food.

► Our study lesson opens with the drought becoming so severe that even the Book of Kerith dried up. So the Lord spoke urgently to Elijah, instructing him to go **immediately** to Zarephath of Sidon and seek out a certain widow who will provide food and safe lodging for him.

Q: What is ironic about the Lord sending Elijah to Zarephath of Sidon?

In Zarephath...

1 Kings 17:10-11 • So [Elijah] 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?" • As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

Q: From what the Lord had said to Elijah, what and who was he probably expecting to find?

Q: Why is it important to the story line that he found this woman as she was gathering sticks?

Q: Why is it both surprising and problematic for Elijah to call to her and ask for water as he did?

Q: What did Elijah hope to gain by his request of her?

The woman responds to Elijah ...

1 Kings 17:12 • "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 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."

Q: How did the woman refer to Jehovah Yahweh and what does that tell us?

Q: What has Elijah now learned about this woman?

1 Kings 17:13-14 • Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

• 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 gives rain on the land.' "

Q: How does Elijah reply to the widow?

Q: Why was it necessary for the widow to make the cake of bread for Elijah, first?

1 Kings 17:15-16 • 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. 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.

Q: Who was reaping the blessing of this miracle God was providing?

Q: Elijah was being hunted, so he was at grave risk. But what about the widow? What was the potential cost to her?

Q: God knew how long the drought was going to last, even if no one else did. And he was committed to providing flour and oil to the widow for the duration. So ... why didn't God just give her everything she would need, all at once?

**Time moved on seemingly without problems.
Elijah occupied the upper room waiting on the Lord.
There was joy because God kept supplying their needs.
Then, disaster strikes ...**

*1 Kings 17:17-18 • Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.
• 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?"*

Q: In what way was the death of the widow's son a double blow to her?

Q: The widow had been experiencing an on-going miracle from the Elijah's God, so why does she lash out against Elijah rather than appeal to him and ask him to ask his God for help?

1 Kings 17:19-20 • "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.
 • Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"

Elijah responds with great compassion and without accusation ...

Q: When Elijah takes the boy from his mother's arms and takes him to his quarters in the upper room, what do we learn about Elijah's emotional state?

Q: Just what was an "upper room" in that culture?

1 King 17:21 • Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

Q: What is the significance of Elijah stretching himself out on the boy three times?

► Here are some examples of calling on the Name of the Lord using a repetition of three:

Psalms 55:16-17	But I call to God, and the LORD saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.
Daniel 6:10	Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.
Isaiah 6:3	And they [the seraphs with six wings] were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."
2 Corinthians 12:8-9	Three times I [Paul] pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Q: When Elijah prayed, was he performing some kind of ritual or mantra in order to convince God to work a miracle?

*1 King 17:22-24 · The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.
· 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!"
· 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."*

- Q: What do we learn from the fact that the Lord heard and answered Elijah's prayer?
- Q: What do we learn from the Widow's response when Elijah brings her son back to her?
- Q: What is the overall statement that the Lord is making here by bringing the Widow's son back to life?

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Next Time ◆ Lesson #48
“Life & Times of Jeremiah”
Part 1 of 6