

Changed

1 Kings 17:8-16, 24

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A. Tested (vs. 8-11):

1. The Word of the Lord – When the Lord speaks His prophetic Word, it asserts itself with all His authority and power. Elijah, the Lord’s revered prophet, quickly accepts what the Lord says and obeys immediately.
 - a) Whom I serve: “before whom I stand,” a technical expression indicating one who stands in the service of a king. Kings and priests in Israel were supposed to be anointed to serve as official representatives of the Lord, Israel’s Great King, leading Israel in the way of faithfulness to the Lord and channeling his covenantal care and blessings to them. Since the days of Jeroboam, the northern kingdom had not had such a priest (12:31), and its kings had all been unfaithful. Now, in the great crisis brought on by Ahab’s promotion of Baal worship, the Lord sent Elijah (and after him Elisha) to serve as his representative (instead of king and priest), much as Moses had done long ago. The author of Kings highlights many parallels between Elijah’s and Moses’ ministries.
 - b) fed by ravens. Ravens are known to roost in desolate rocky areas like the wadi. Their habit of storing excess foods in rocky crags worked to Elijah’s benefit. He could observe where they put the food and retrieve it. While much of the diet of ravens consists of carrion, they also eat fruit such as dates.¹
2. Arise – Elijah had to gather himself and find the strength to make this long journey, as God commanded.
3. Go to Zarephath - Elijah must focus on this until he reaches Zarephath because the brook where he was staying dried up, and the Lord continued to care for him. Elijah travels, expecting God to care for him in a drought through a widow.
 - a) Zarephath (modern Sarafand) is a town near the coast of the Mediterranean between Tyre and Sidon. It is listed as a harbor city in thirteenth-century B.C. Egyptian texts. It was a flourishing manufacturing and industrial center throughout the first millennium B.C. and down into Roman times. Its importance here is that it shows that Yahweh had also produced a drought in Baal’s own home territory.²

¹ Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament*](#) (electronic ed., 1 Ki 17:9). InterVarsity Press.

² Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament*](#) (electronic ed., 1 Ki 17:9). InterVarsity Press.

4. Lived, stay – Elijah must set in his mind that he is going to stay in this city until God directs him elsewhere. This place not only feeds him; it protects him from Ahab, who was seeking to kill him. A widow is going to protect him from Ahab, who is seeking to kill him, not an army.
5. I have commanded the widow – Because the widow had a long-lasting relationship with the Lord, she willingly obeyed when God firmly and verbally instructed her to care of Elijah. She remained committed to the task until she completed it.
 - a) In a society that is subject to disease and warfare, it is not uncommon to find widows. Since a widow had no inheritance rights, special provisions were typically made for them under the law, allowing them to glean in harvested fields and protecting them from being oppressed. They needed protection under the law because they were powerless to protect themselves and were often dependent on charity for survival. Widows were usually poor people; normally they ran out of food first in a famine. This famine had been created by the drought. Therefore going to a widow for food was a strange directive. God was again using an unusual source to feed His prophet.³
 - b) 17:12–16. The widow recognized Elijah as an Israelite and appealed to Yahweh in affirming that she had no bread; she had only a little flour and oil, enough for a last meal for her son and herself. Here was a Gentile woman in Phoenicia who believed in the Lord; she said she believed He is alive (As surely as the LORD your God lives; cf. v. 1; 18:10).⁴
6. To provide, sustainer – God commanded this widow to continuously provide food for Elijah because he was out of food. She obeyed God completely, even when she didn't have enough for herself.
7. When he came to the gate of the city – Elijah obeyed God and arrived at the gate of the city with no plans to go anywhere until he fulfilled what the Lord said.
 - a) Town gate (17:10). The city gate was a center of commerce and civic activity. People living in poverty were more likely to find scraps of food and other useful items here.
8. Behold – interjection, participle, adverbial, quasiverbal – The widow gathering sticks immediately got the attention of Elijah because the Lord told him to meet a widow in Zarephath. The providence of God is powerful.
 - a) Elijah left a brook that dried up and found a woman who had water (vs. 11). God seems to have led Elijah directly to the woman.

³ Constable, T. L. (1985). 1 Kings. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 523–525). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Constable, T. L. (1985). 1 Kings. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 523–525). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

9. Get me a drink of water - Elijah asked for a drink of water. He must have been thirsty from his trip.
10. As she was going to get it he called her and said – “bring a piece of bread” - The widow responded readily, but in that moment, Elijah loudly made another request: that she bring to him the piece of bread she had in her hands. The text implies she did not have an entire loaf of bread, and by saying “in her hands,” the writer indicates she has the authority to say yes or no. Her decision to give her last was totally up to her.

B. Fears to Conquer (vs. 12-14):

1. As the Lord lives – Despite the fact that the Lord God of Israel is intrinsically good and provides health, prosperity and vitality she only has a little flour and oil left for a last meal, and no bread. By responding in the manner the widow is stating her conviction that the Lord is God, and she is confident that despite the desperate circumstances she was enduring, the Lord is still actively functioning.
 - a) There Elijah would demonstrate God’s power to provide flour, oil, and rain (HE IS THE GOD OF FERTILITY)—blessings customarily attributed to Baal. Also, this section emphasizes that God can protect the faithful—in this case, Elijah and the widow—even when outside of the land of Israel. This would be a powerful lesson to the Israelites in captivity in Babylon that God can bless his faithful people anywhere. The point of the resurrection of the widow’s son was found in the widow’s response to the miracle (17:24). The prophet’s word was truth, even though the king and other Israelites did not believe it.⁵
 - b) There must have been something recognizably Israelite in Elijah’s appearance, and the woman follows standard protocol by pronouncing her oath in the name of the deity of the person to whom she is speaking. Though she uses a common oath formula, she also unwittingly offers affirmation of Yahweh’s vitality. Her phrase betrays nothing of any personal belief in Yahweh.⁶
 - c) This widow believed in the same Lord who allowed her to have no husband and is at her last meal, preparing for her and her son to die. Yet, although the same Lord allowed her to suffer (her husband is dead, no food because of the drought), she continued to listen when He spoke.
2. As the Lord lives – The faith of this widow is powerful. She is down to her last, but she is still willing, to obey God’s command and do what Elijay says. Her circumstances are dire! She only has ‘a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold.’ She is preparing this last meal before she dies.
3. I may go and prepare to die – She has accepted her fate but still believes in the Lord God.

⁵ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 136). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁶ Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed., 1 Ki 17:9). InterVarsity Press.

- a) Grain and oil were two of the major exports of the city of Zarephath. Their shortage indicates how severe the drought was. They are also two of the most basic commodities for survival. As staple products, they represent the major arena where fertility can be observed. The contest between Yahweh and Baal continues as Yahweh demonstrates that He is able to provide for “Baal’s people” in “Baal’s territory” just as easily as He is able to provide for his own people and just as easily as He is able to withhold from whomever He chooses.
 - b) From the fact that she was gathering sticks, it is evident that the woman was poor and forsaken. To test whether she was the person who was to provide for him, wearied by his journey in the heat of the sun, he begs her first of all for a drink of water (by לֶחָם a drinking-cup which he had brought from the brook Cherith, is to be understood).
4. Elijah said to her “Do not fear” - Elijah repeatedly told the widow, with no plans to stop, that she must not allow her circumstances to affect her faith. The widow was at the city gate because God commanded her to be there (this could be verbal, it seems like it is, or God’s providence). She was there to meet Elijah and provide for him. Even though she had little, and there was no food anywhere because of the drought, she must continue to obey God.
 5. Elijah said to her “Do not fear” - We may obey God and come to church to listen to God’s pastor-teacher, but are we willing when it does not make sense because of what we have to give, support God’s ministry or not. It is up to her to decide.
 6. Make me a bread cake and bring it to me – Elijah spoke continuously, as if he didn’t hear the widow, because he was confident that the Lord’s supply would be continuous since the Lord told him to remain in Zarephath. So it was not going to be the last meal; it was going to be the first meal. Elijah’s faith in the Lord empowered him to see beyond the present circumstances, and this is why he told her not to fear.
- a) Flour and oil. One typical baked product that formed a basic part of the meal was a small flat cake made of wheat flour and cooked in oil.
 - b) Elijah, as the bearer of God’s Word, was now to be sustained by human hands. Still they were the hands of a poor widow facing starvation (v.12). She was, moreover, from outside the circle of God’s chosen people (Lk. 4:25-26)—in fact, she was from the pagan nation that at that time (much like Egypt earlier and Babylon later) represented the forces arrayed against God’s kingdom.

C. Faith Demanded (vs. 14-17, 22-24):

1. Thus says the Lord God – What Elijah said to the widow was exactly how God intended to bless her family (Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6-15). She did not need to worry. It is the Lord who will sustain her, not Elijah, her savings, the city, or her farm, if she had one. He says this before she baked the cake to encourage her to trust in the Lord, since she

obviously loved her son. He is going to remain there so there is no need for her to think her oil and flour will ever run out; 'until the day that the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth.' (vs. 14)

2. So she went - The widow may have had her fears, but once she heard from the man of God, she trusted God's Word and obeyed. She obeyed God even though there had been no rain for years, no more food left, no husband to farm, and only a young son. She did not see her bowl full right away. She still has a bowl of flour and a little oil in her hands. This is why her obedience is a step of faith.
3. The bowl was not exhausted or empty – The bowl will never be full until the rains come. God is completely committed and purposeful, with no intention to stop; He kept her jars full. God will commit Himself to this task because the widow chose to trust His Word unequivocally. There is no stopping God (Luke 6:38). Jobs can shut down, and oil reserves can run out but when God sustains you are 'pressed down shaken together and running over.'
- a) This miracle of God's continually supplying flour and olive oil was another polemic (protest) against Baal, just as was the drought. Baal-worshippers believed he was a fertility god, giving rain to make crops grow. But he could not overcome the drought to make wheat and olive trees grow. Only the true God could provide flour and oil in a drought!⁷
4. According to the Word of God – God's Word never returns void (Isaiah 55:11). It endures forever (1 Peter 1:24-25; Matt. 24:35; Isaiah 40:8). It is powerful and unchangeable (Hebrews 4:12; Ps. 119:89), and God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). She is in a drought because God's Word stands.
5. Elijah raised her son back to life (vs. 21-24):
 - a) Her willingness to trust God and live a life of faith, not fear, placed a position where, when trouble comes, she is more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37).
 - b) Her life when from waiting to die to overcoming her son's death.
 - c) When you open your life to God, you never know what He will allow you to experience or how He may choose to bless you.

⁷ Constable, T. L. (1985). 1 Kings. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 523–525). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.