

# Blessed for Faithfulness

Bible Background • 1 KINGS 17:1–24

Printed Text • 1 KINGS 17:8–16 | Devotional Reading • PROVERBS 3:1–10

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: TELL how the widow of Zarephath was blessed for her faithfulness to do as the prophet instructed her, FEEL confident that God can reward sacrificial faithfulness, and PLAN ways to support people and causes as acts of faithfulness to God.

## In Focus

Bertha had agreed to drive Mother Mason, one of the elderly women at the church, to a town a couple hours away. Mother Mason wanted to go to her sister's house to help prepare for an upcoming family reunion.

On the way over to pick up Mother Mason, Bertha tuned in to the local weather and traffic radio station. "There's been a major accident on Highway 30," the radio announcer reported. "Traffic is backed up, and it may take hours to clear the road. Avoid this area, if at all possible." Bertha sighed to herself. Highway 30 was the only way to travel to Mother Mason's sister's home.

"Sorry, Mother Mason," Bertha said when she arrived at the house. "I'll have to take you later this afternoon or tomorrow. But no way are we going to get into all that traffic." Mother Mason agreed. "I'll just go ahead and make some dishes and desserts here at home and wrap them up and take them tomorrow."

*God uses circumstances, the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and wise counsel from godly people to guide His children. When we follow what God has said, we find that everything works together for good. Identify how you can learn to listen to and follow the Holy Spirit's direction, even if it means giving up something you cherish.*

## Keep in Mind

"There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah" (1 Kings 17:16, NLT)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Zidon** (v. 9) Tsidon (Heb.) — A major city of Phoenicia on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea

**B. Cruse** (v. 12) tsappachath (Heb.) — A small jar for liquids as water or oil

## Say It Correctly

**Zarephath.** ZAIR-uh-fath

**Sidon.** SIE-don

**Phoenecia(n).** foe-NEE-shuh(n)

## KJV

**1 Kings 17:8** And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,<sup>9</sup> Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.  
10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.  
11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.  
12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.  
13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.  
14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.  
15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.  
16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

## NLT

**1 Kings 17:8** Then the LORD said to Elijah,  
9 “Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you.”  
10 So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, “Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?”  
11 As she was going to get it, he called to her, “Bring me a bite of bread, too.”  
12 But she said, “I swear by the LORD your God that I don’t have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die.”  
13 But Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you’ve said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what’s left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son.  
14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!”  
15 So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days.  
16 There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Famine.** A famine is an extreme shortage of food. God often used famines in response to Israel’s continued disobedience. One of the common forms of famine was a drought, which is the excessive dryness of the land. Famines and droughts are recorded throughout the Bible during the time of Abraham (Genesis 12:10), Isaac (Genesis 26:1), Joseph (Genesis 41:27), the Judges (Ruth 1:1), and the Israelites in the days of David (2 Samuel 21:1), Elijah (1 Kings 18:2), Elisha (2 Kings 4:38), Haggai (Haggai 1:11), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 5:3). In an agrarian society like Israel, the failure of a single season’s crop could mean the starvation and death of many during the resulting famine.

## Background

In their first iteration, the books of 1 and 2 Kings were a single literary work meant to provide a continuous account of Israel's history after the death of David, the second king of Israel. God blessed David and his descendants, and Jesus was part of his lineage. In Hebrew texts, 1 and 2 Kings were divided into separate books during the Middle Ages under the influence of earlier Greek and Latin translations, which saw them as the continuation of the history of Israelite kingship beginning in 1 Samuel. In Jewish tradition, they are part of the division of the Bible called the Former Prophets which includes Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. Together the books of the Former Prophets recount the history of Israel from the conquest of Canaan to the end of the monarchy and the beginning of exile.

The theological concern of these books is worship that was meant to happen at the temple in Jerusalem. In 1 and 2 Kings, the rulers are assessed based on their adherence to regular worship in Jerusalem and their commitment to worshipping only the God of Israel. For example, Ahab became king of Israel and did more evil things than all the kings before him (1 Kings 16:29–30). Ahab and his wife Jezebel angered God by worshipping Baal. In an abrupt introduction to the prophet, Elijah tells Ahab that there would be a drought in Israel (1 Kings 17:1). The three-year drought proved the efficacy of God over Baal. (Baal was a storm god who was believed to bring rain and fertility to the land.) God then commands Elijah to go live in Zarephath, which was in the heartland of the Baal cult (1 Kings 17:8–16). God told Elijah that a widow there would feed him. The story focuses on Elijah's ability to perform miracles, but it also demonstrates the way God cares for those who love and serve Him.

### At-A-Glance

1. Encounter at the Gate (1 Kings 17:8–10)
2. Confronting the Fear (vv. 11–13)
3. God Provides Enough (vv. 14–16)

## In Depth

### 1. Encounter at the Gate (1 Kings 17:8–10)

Although there was a drought in Israel, God had always provided Elijah with meat, bread, and water. God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath on the Phoenician coast south of Sidon (1 Kings 17:8-9). It is a highly charged location for Elijah to visit because it is in the heartland of the Baal cult. While there, Elijah learns God had commanded a widow to feed him. Although in the ancient world hospitality would have demanded that the widow open her door to a stranger, she had no means to care for herself because she lacked the economic support her husband had provided. Since the king did not provide for her, the widow was soon to become impoverished. In the midst of a drought, here is a woman who had so little and could not acquire resources for herself or her household because she was a widow, and she is the one Elijah asks to bring him some water to drink. Elijah faithfully traveled into enemy territory and asks for resources from a woman who had very little to give.

*What does Elijah's commitment to following God and their shared commitment to caring for each other teach us about hospitality?*

### 2. Confronting the Fear (vv. 11–13)

Just as the hospitable widow went to get water for Elijah to drink, he asked her to bring him some bread as well. At this, she refuses his request. She tells the prophet that she only has a handful of meal in a jar and a bit of oil. Before his arrival, she had planned to cook her remaining meal in the rest of her oil for herself and her son. After they ate it, they planned to die. In the face of such dire conditions, it seems that the prophet would have

left her alone. She only had a bit of food left, and as a widow, she lacked the means to gain additional resources in the future. The social expectations of the ancient world made women depend on the men in their lives to gain the resources they needed. Even though Elijah was a man, he could not provide for her, but Elijah knew that the God of Israel was a provider. He assuaged her fear, promising that after she had made something for him, she and her son would still have enough.

*What does this story reveal about the way God can provide for us even when we believe we have nothing left to give?*

### **3. God Provides Enough (vv. 14–16)**

Although the widow had so little meal left in her jar, Elijah assured her that the jar would not be emptied and that the jug of oil would not fail until the drought was over. She did as Elijah commanded her, and she and her household had food to eat for many days as the Lord had promised them. The widow lived in Baal territory, and the Scripture does not reveal whether she believed in Israel's God, but her wording to Elijah "the LORD your God" (v. 12) would imply the Lord was not also her God. In this case, though, she listened to a prophet of the Lord, and she was never without. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, he taught them to ask for their daily bread, and the story of a widow who had so little yet received daily provision for herself and her household challenges us to be faithful to God, believing that God will provide what we need for each day.

*What happens to the widow when she releases her fear of not having enough and surrenders to the will of God? What might her witness have revealed to those who encountered her during the drought?*

#### **Search the Scriptures**

1. What compelled Elijah to move to a new location, and how does he forge a new relationship when he arrives?
2. When the widow is most desperate, God commands her to care for a stranger. What does this Scripture reveal about the connection between serving others and self-care?

#### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. What evidence in the Scripture demonstrates the extreme situation the woman is facing?
2. Why did the widow do what this stranger, Elijah, instructed?

#### **Liberating Lesson**

Many of us can relate to the feeling that we do not have enough to provide for ourselves and the people we love. Many of us have encountered financial hardships. Most of us have survived large and small natural disasters that impacted our quality of life. In those moments, it feels like it is all we can do to take care of our own needs. Some of us even feel like the widow in our Scripture for today, ready to use the scant resources we have left and then accept death, and yet God provides. The challenge this Scripture presents is to choose not to turn inward and to care only for our immediate needs in times of difficulty. The Scripture indicates that even in the midst of our struggles, there are people we are called to serve. If you are enduring hardship right now, know that if you are faithful to God, God will bring you through every challenge; pray that you will be a source of hope, joy, and encouragement to others even amid your personal storm.

#### **Application for Activation**

In times of hardship, "fear not" (v. 13); you are not alone. Obey God's voice because He will direct you toward the resources you need to not only survive but also to thrive. Even in times of famine, we can care for each other. In all seasons of our lives, we can lean into opportunities to serve others. We all have something we can give to spread the love of God to others. You can choose not to give in to your fear and desperation. Even on your darkest days, God is with you. Choose life, compassion, and hope.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### 1 Kings 17:8–16

**17:8 And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, 9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.**

Elijah receives instructions directly from God. It was time to leave the first place of hiding beside the brook Cherith, being fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:3). The Lord had made other arrangements for Elijah's survival. This time God's instructions take Elijah right into the midst of Baal worshipers. Zarephath was a coastal Phoenician city south of Zidon (or Sidon), the principal city of Baal worship. This was out of Ahab's territory. The time for another confrontation had not yet arrived. Elijah was to live there and be sustained by the poorest of the poor, a widow. Widows fell quickly into poverty without a husband to provide for them, being reduced to begging. In Israel, the commandments urged the local priesthood or palace to include widows and orphans under their care. This may not have been the case in Phoenicia.

**10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.**

As he had when delivering his first message and then retreating to the brook, once again Elijah obeys the Lord's instructions. When he arrives at the entrance to the city, immediately he sees a widow gathering sticks for a fire. But how would he be sure whether she was the one God commanded to sustain him? Surely she is not the only widow in the city. He calls to her and politely asks her to get him a drink of water in a vessel. The expression "I pray thee" turns the simple understanding of the verb as a command ("Fetch me") into a request. After all, he is the stranger. She would have had to draw this water from a deep well, supplied by underground springs because there had been no rain.

The whole encounter raises questions about hospitality. Usually, men and women did not address one another in public places. It is even more unusual for Elijah, a stranger to the city, to approach a local citizen. Normally, rulers stationed men near the gate of the city. It was their job to check out strangers to determine whether they were friend or foe. Friends would be welcomed into the city and shown the utmost hospitality. Foes would be escorted out. This unusual behavior was likely Elijah's way of testing to see if she was the one whom Yahweh commanded. Abraham's servant uses a similar test to ask God to reveal the woman who should marry Isaac (Genesis 24:10–20).

**11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.**

Instead of fleeing from this stranger, the widow goes to get him the water he had requested. She has no way to know how far he had come without water. Perhaps her instinct for caring coupled with the norms of hospitality took over her sense of fear. When she responds in this way, Elijah is more confident that she is indeed the one. Before she can fulfill his first request, he calls to her with a second request. Again very politely, he asks her for a small portion of bread. Again he is very humble in his request as he does not ask for much, just a morsel.

**12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.**

Somehow, the widow recognizes that Elijah is a worshiper of the Lord, Yahweh, and not of Baal. She is even familiar with the name of Yahweh (“LORD” v. 12). The phrase “as ... God liveth” is a common way to affirm the truth of your statement (Judges 8:19; 1 Samuel 19:6; Jeremiah 38:16), as we might say today “I swear to God.” Despite her knowledge of Jews and their God, however, the woman distances herself from them in speaking to Elijah of the Lord “thy” God. Even though the woman is willing to be kind to Elijah and bring him water during a drought, she still affirms that she is separate from him in culture and deity.

Then she confesses to Elijah that she is at the end of her supplies and cannot see how she will provide for herself and her son. Ideally, a widow’s family would take care of her after her father died. However, usually, a woman’s children were grown before her husband died and were physically and financially able to care for the widow. This widow’s son must have been very young if she was still taking care of him even in such desperate poverty. She had planned to prepare this last meal for herself and for her son; then they would die of starvation in a few days.

**13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.**

Elijah gives her assurance, “Fear not.” He tells the widow to go ahead as she had planned, only make a small cake for him first and bring it to him. Then she should prepare for herself and her son. Elijah is asking her to put her trust in him and his God. If she is willing to do this act of kindness first, demonstrating obedience and trust in Yahweh, then she could go on with her plan. But Elijah has more to offer her than words of assurance. He also has a promise from God!

**14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.**

Elijah tells the widow of Yahweh’s promise to sustain them throughout the drought. The barrel of meal, which contains only a handful, will never spoil or run out. Even the container of oil, which has only a few drops, will never fail to supply their need until the time that Yahweh causes the rain to return to the earth. She will be sustained better during this drought than she had been before if she only trusts in the man of God and obeys what Yahweh had commanded her.

**15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house did eat many days.**

The widow decides to trust and obey Yahweh, a God foreign to her. Her faith in Baal had not kept her from the brink of starvation, but she experiences the power of Yahweh for herself. And thus, she and Elijah and her son eat for a long time from the food Yahweh supplies. Surely others must have noticed how well fed she and her household looked, while others looked malnourished.

**16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.**

Because of her obedience, Yahweh fulfills His promise. This is the very lesson that Yahweh wants Israel to learn, but they are too busy putting their trust in Baal. Elijah's successor, Elisha, will help another widow in a similar way. That widow receives an abundance of oil that she can sell to liberate her family from the threat of starvation (2 Kings 4:1–7). God provided for the Zarephath widow daily but provided for the other widow in one grand gesture. Our God does both. Be careful not to overlook God's small daily provision hoping for a bigger blessing.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

Keep God's Commandments  
(Proverbs 3:1–10)

## **TUESDAY**

On the Mountain with Jesus  
(Matthew 17:1–7)

## **WEDNESDAY**

Prophetic Examples of Faithfulness  
(Luke 4:24–30)

## **THURSDAY**

Paul in Faithfulness Restores Life  
(Acts 20:7–12)

## **FRIDAY**

God-sent Raven Feeds Elijah  
(1 Kings 17:1–7)

## **SATURDAY**

Elijah Restores Life to Widow's Son  
(1 Kings 17:17–24)

## **SUNDAY**

Widow's Faithfulness Rewarded  
(1 Kings 17:8–16)