

Face to Face

with

The Widow of Zarephath

First Day

Her Story

"But all of us who are Christians have no veils on our faces, but reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transformed in ever-increasing splendor into His own image, and this is the work of the Lord who is the Spirit." (II Corinthians 3:18 PHILLIPS)

Our study this week of the Widow of Zarephath gives us the wonderful opportunity to see faith in action on the part of the widow, and the miraculous in action on the part of God. One of the interesting parts of this story is that this widow lived in a town located between Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia. She was a Gentile. This one fact makes her faith that much more exceptional and the miracle that much more precious. You see, our God is no respecter of persons, and His miracles are performed when faith is displayed.

We will begin by looking at what Scripture tells us about the Widow of Zarephath. *This is her story.*

Open your Bible to **I Kings 17**. We will be looking at the whole chapter to gain the entire context of the story. Read through each of the following passages and in a few sentences summarize the events described there:

verses 1-7 _____

verses 8-16 _____

verses 17-24 _____

Although we are focusing on the Widow of Zarephath, the background of the story we have just read is actually Israel's sin and the ministry of God through His prophet Elijah. If we look up just a few verses into chapter 16 we see the situation from God's eyes. Read **I Kings 16:29-33** and, in a sentence or two, record what you understand to be Israel's problem. _____

What was God's response to Israel's sin? I Kings 17:1 _____

It is in this situation – the famine in the land of Israel and Elijah's personal need because of this famine – which we find the Widow of Zarephath. Before God used her to care for Elijah, Scripture records the amazing fact that He cared for him through a brook and a raven. Then, when the brook dried up, He sent Elijah to Zarephath to a widow living there...

What was the *affliction* of the Widow of Zarephath? _____

What was her *blessing*? _____

What did she *learn*? _____

Second Day

Her Manner

Who is She?

“Adding your diligence [to the divine promises], employ every effort in exercising your faith to develop virtue (excellence, resolution, Christian energy), and in [exercising] virtue [develop] knowledge (intelligence), and in [exercising] knowledge [develop] self-control, and in [exercising] self-control [develop] steadfastness (patience, endurance), and in [exercising] steadfastness [develop] godliness (piety), and in [exercising] godliness [develop] brotherly affection, and in [exercising] brotherly affection [develop] Christian love.” (II Peter 1:5-7 AMPLIFIED)

We are not told the Widow of Zarephath's name. The word “Zarephath” may mean “smelling furnace.”

Today we will be looking at the *character* of the Widow of Zarephath. Although we know little about her beyond the words written here, as we carefully consider her story, we can glean many things. We know that she was a widow. We know she had a son. We know that her situation was dire. Read the **I Kings** account again and use the following words to describe her:

- *Her strength*
- *Her weakness*
- *Her love*
- *Her hope*

What stands out to you personally when you read the account of this woman in Scripture?

In what way might her story change the way you look at life? _____

Third Day

Her Hope

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.” (Luke 1:45 NASB)

From what you have studied about the Widow of Zarephath this week:

What was her *need*? _____

What was her *hope*? _____

What was God’s *promise*? _____

As we look at the need of the widow, we are brought back to the need of Elijah. It was his need of provision that brought him to this widow in the first place. Considering the fact that God first provided for His servant Elijah by way of a raven, and then by way of a starving widow, what might you learn about His ability to provide for you? _____

Memory Verse:

God's word to the Widow of Zarephath was, *"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."* In Philippians 4:19 He speaks a similar word of provision to us, ***"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*** This is our memory verse this week – begin memorizing it today!

This promise includes, but is certainly not limited to, practical needs like flour and oil. See if you can think of other things that might be included in the promise found here (think of some of the needs you have known). _____

- Is it possible that there is a need not covered by the promise in this verse?

- Do you have need of any of the things that you have just listed? If so, begin praying for that need today using this promise of God as your confidence. *"Dear God, I need _____ . Your Word promises that you will supply all of my need according to your riches in glory by Christ Jesus. I believe your promise and I am watching expectantly for the answer."*

Remember as you pray that you must pray according to God's will. I John 5:14 says, *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."*

One other thing stands out in this story. Reread verse 13 and note the word that tells when Elijah asked her to make the cake for him. _____

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke a word of wisdom to His disciples that had the potential of profoundly affecting the very way they lived their lives. Look at Matthew 6:33 and share the Word of the Lord found there. _____

- How can you apply this word in your particular situation, and what difference might it make?

Fourth Day

Her Gifts

In today's portion of the lesson we will be looking at the subject of gifts: what they are, the practical ways we use them, and God's purpose in giving them. We will sometimes look at the *spiritual gifts* mentioned in the books of the New Testament, but also in a broader sense, we will consider the *practical* talents and abilities that enhance our everyday life.

- Identify the gift(s) you see operating in the widow of Zarepath.

If you have ever known hard times, perhaps you can begin to understand the feelings of aloneness and desperation that this woman must have experienced as she planned one last meal for herself and her son before they died. But the act of her relinquishing that final provision to Elijah was nothing short of divinely inspired: "...*I have commanded a widow there to provide for you*" (I Kings 17:9b). The test was a severe one. If she would first bake a small loaf for Elijah before seeing to her own family's need, God would honor her obedience with His provision as long as the drought would last. For Elijah to make himself dependent upon such a woman would also be a dramatic test of his faith in God.

There is no evidence that God provided a huge supply; it was simply a matter of the ingredients being available as they continued to be needed. Each use of the flour and the oil required the faith to believe that God would provide. Each day's blessing was precipitated by a willingness to give as well as receive.

How often might we miss the provision of God because our eyes are fixed on ourselves rather than on the needs of others? What blessings escape us because we are unwilling to reach out and allow Him to use us to alleviate suffering? As we will see, the scriptural perspective is always to give first, trusting God to care for us.

- In your own words, share the priority and the promise stated in Luke 6:38?
- Use II Corinthians 9:6-7 to compare the principle of sowing and reaping.
- What does the above passage say about the heart attitude in giving?
- What promise is there to claim in Proverbs 11:25?

As we have looked at the example of giving in all three of our lessons so far this year, it is remarkable to realize that Mary gave a gift that was very costly but she had it to give. The Shunammite woman also gave sacrificially of her means and herself, but she, too, gave out of her abundance. The Widow of Zarephath, however, out of her poverty gave all that she had – and she did so without complaint. Certainly no one would fault her if she did complain, for her lot in life offered no hope. And yet God had His eye on her and a plan in mind.

I Peter 4:9-10 AMPLIFIED says: *“Practice hospitality to one another (those of the household of faith). [Be hospitable, be a lover of strangers, with brotherly affection for the unknown guests, the foreigners, the poor, and all others who come your way who are of Christ’s body.] And [in each instance] do it ungrudgingly (cordially and graciously, without complaining but as representing Him). As each of you has received a gift (a particular spiritual talent, a gracious divine endowment), employ it for one another as [befits] good trustees of God’s many-sided grace [faithful stewards of the extremely diverse powers and gifts granted to Christians by unmerited favor].”*

Who knows what plan God has in mind for you? Think for a moment about what you have to share with others. Record your thoughts as you prayerfully consider how you will determine – this week – to open:

Your heart _____

Your hand _____

Your home _____

As you keep your heart, hands and home open this week to let God use you, make note of how He provides and be prepared to share this with your group: _____

Try to maintain the attitude of putting the needs of others ahead of your own and trusting God to provide for you. Psalm 37:16 NLT says to each one of us: *“The little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked.”* If we would learn to take God at His word, we would understand that little is much when God is in it!

Fifth Day

Her Legacy

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

Keep in mind that while you are examining the legacy of the women in your lesson each week, you are leaving imprints of your own. The chapters of their lives are history now, but yours are still being written. How will you be remembered? How would you like to be remembered? What will you leave behind of benefit for others? These are some of the questions you will consider each week. Remember that what you do and say today will leave a pattern of behavior viewed by others tomorrow and in the years to come.

Taking a closer look...

Jesus Himself stated this woman's legacy in Luke 4:25-26: *"But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath...to a woman who was a widow."*

- What makes the Widow of Zarephath memorable to you?
- What do you learn about the importance of obedience from her example?

Taking a personal look...

God demonstrated His care and concern for this woman and her son, as well as for His prophet. Taking God at His word, both learned to trust in the *Provider* rather than in His *provision*.

- What have you learned this week about God's provision for you?
- Are you relying on Him for your daily spiritual, emotional, and physical needs?
- Are you allowing your gratitude for Him to increase your sense of His presence?

Passing it on...

- Do you know someone who is a widow? Is there some way you might be of assistance to her, such as: coming alongside and being a friend, offering emotional support, or helping with the practical needs of the household and with childcare?

Sixth Day

Your Prayer

Each day this week you have examined up close – face to face – a woman of the Bible: her *story and manner*; her *promise and hope*; her *gifts and legacy*. Throughout the process, as you learned about her, you also learned about yourself.

Now the focus shifts to *Your Prayer*. Each week during your group time you will have the opportunity to pray in agreement with the other ladies for the things you write down on this personalized page. Keep an updated account in the *Praise* list each week as God answers your petitions. Let's begin this year by coming boldly to His throne and learning to pray the **BIG PRAYER** with expectancy! The only prerequisite for such boldness is being *humble* and *real* in His presence.

Prayer: Write out your prayer for each of the following...

I praise God for (an aspect of His marvelous character) _____

I confess to God _____

I thank God for _____

I ask God for _____

Promise: Write out this week's *promise* in the space provided...and learn this year to pray these promises from Scripture.

Praise: If God has answered a prayer request for you this week or fulfilled a desire of your heart, please write it out and date it as a stone of remembrance.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.