

# Miracles at Zarephath

THE DROUGHT was beginning to bite. The brook where Elijah was hiding had now dried up, and so the Lord God told him to move north–west to Zarephath, a town in Sidon, where a widow was to feed him.

It would have been a long journey, possibly as much as ninety miles, all on foot. Elijah would be tired when he reached the little town, ready for food and water. As he approached the gate of the town he found the widow, gathering firewood, and asked for some water to drink. As she went off to get some, he also asked for food, and must have wondered whether God really had planned this correctly. He asked her for just a “morsel of bread”, only to receive this reply:

*As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die (1 Kings 17:12).*

The widow knew who Elijah was, and seems to have been expecting him, and yet had nothing for him. In fact she was about to cook the last of the food they had for herself and her son, and resign herself to death. What had seemed to be a careful plan was apparently falling apart. The famine had clearly spread well beyond the boundaries of Israel.

Elijah was not put off by this apparent reversal, tired though he was. He said:

*Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son (v13).*

To do so would be a tremendous act of faith on the part of the widow, effectively to give away her last meal, and that of her son also. Elijah had one more comment for her.

*For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘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’ (v14).*

The widow did as Elijah asked, and miraculously the flour jar never emptied, nor the jug of oil. It was a hand–to–mouth



existence, but it worked, just as God had said it would. They simply needed to trust.

## God's Power at Work

The feeding of Elijah by God at the brook Cherith, and the subsequent provision of food for the prophet, the widow and her son in Zarephath were both miraculous. The next event in the life of Elijah was also a miracle, and an event which at that point was unique.

During Elijah's stay, the son of the widow became unwell, and then died. The widow felt that this was a judgement by God on her past life. Her accusation directed at Elijah is full of emotion:

*What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son? (v18).*

It is not surprising that she was so distraught, having already lost her husband and now her son also.

Elijah did not waste time attempting to justify himself, or even to explore the conduct of the widow before he had arrived. He said simply "Give me your son" and took the lifeless body to the upper room of the house, which he was using whilst he was there. He then took the problem to God in prayer.

*O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son? (v20).*

Elijah could not understand the reason the boy had died, perhaps the Lord God could

tell him the reason. He then performed an act which some have likened to mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but may not have had anything to do with that, for he continued to pray for God to revive the boy.

He had no historical evidence that anything would happen, but perhaps he was guided by God in what he did, for the account simply tells us that the life of the child came to him again and he revived. This is the first occasion in the Bible where someone is raised from the dead, and what happens just afterwards is of particular interest.

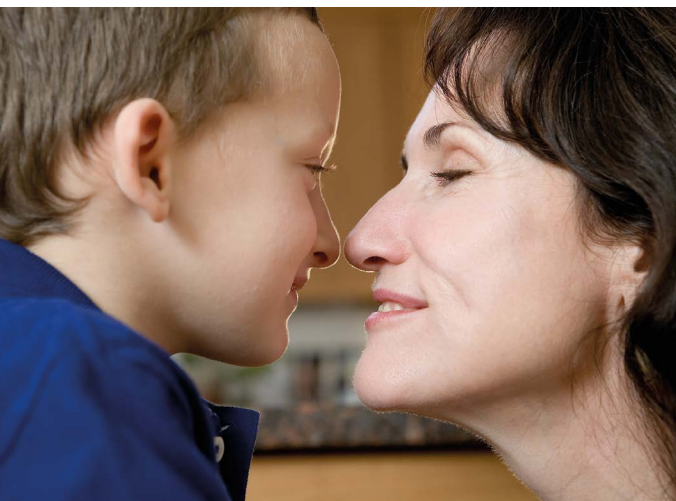
## The Proof of a Prophet

Elijah took the boy down to his mother with the simple comment "See, your son lives". She must have been overjoyed. The future would have looked very bleak without her son. Now it had taken on a much happier prospect. She responded:

*Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth (v24).*

She had already been miraculously fed for some time, when she expected to die, but it was the raising of her son which really convinced her that this was truly a man of God. However, the boy himself appears to have said nothing. We are told what Elijah said, and what the widow said, but nothing the son said is recorded.

This is presumably because he had nothing to say, because from the time he had died and breathed his last, until the time Elijah brought life back and he revived, he was



## Back to Israel

It is not clear just when Elijah went to Zarephath, but he appears to have stayed there for the rest of the drought and famine period. The next that we hear of Elijah is when God gives him the next part of his mission like this:

*And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth' (1 Kings 18:1).*

aware of nothing at all. He was totally without consciousness.

Scripture is totally consistent, what is said in one part is borne out in another. The wise man in Ecclesiastes said this:

*For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten (Ecclesiastes 9:5).*

There is a comment about Elijah's time in Zarephath from the Lord Jesus, who was demonstrating that prophets are often not honoured in their home town:

*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, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow (Luke 4:25–26).*

This was presumably the third year of the drought, as Elijah was about to be sent back to the land of Israel. There, he was to announce that there was to be rain in Israel.

It was to be a difficult time for Elijah. Ahab would not be well pleased with all that had happened, and Elijah would certainly feel the roughness of his temper, but all was being overseen and directed by God.

So, Elijah began the long journey on foot from Sidon back to Samaria, through a parched and famine-stricken Israel. He was about to begin a great demonstration of the power of God. At the same time, he would show that Baal – the false idol worshipped by Ahab and many in Israel – had no power at all.

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