

Exegesis of 1 Kings 17:8-16

OT lesson for Pentecost 23, Series B, Nov. 6, 2009

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I. Background for the pericope of Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath

- A. This is the second of 3 tests Elijah had to undergo after heeding God's Call to ministry, which were:

<u>Test</u>	<u>In order to learn</u>
Being fed by ravens (17:1-6)	The Lord provides
Living in a Foreign land (17:7-16)	The Lord is in control everywhere
Raising the widow's son from the dead (17:17-24)	The power of prayer

(compare with Jesus' 3 tests in the wilderness by Satan)

B. Elijah as a Type of Israel:

1. He was miraculously sustained in the wilderness as Israel was during the 40 year wandering
2. Called to obedience and tested (40 yrs for Israel, 3 ½ yrs for Elijah)

C. Miracles in the OT are actually called "signs" (אֲמוּנָה) which point away from the prophet and to God.

1. See Ex. 7:9; 1 Kgs 13:3; 2 Chron 32:24.
2. Miracles are always "signs" of God's grace and power among His believing people. Thus such things do not happen to/for the unfaithful.

D. Faithfulness of a Gentile vs. Unfaithfulness of Israel

1. The widow is asked to give all she had left to Elijah, and in faith, she does so, much like the widow who gave her last mite (Luke 21:1-3).
2. Like Ruth, the widow from Moab, this widow is more faithful than the people of Israel.

II. Interpretation (my own translation from the Hebrew):

A. v.8—*Then the Word of Yahweh came to him saying*

1. The Word of God in the OT is often given personal characteristics, such as moving or coming into the presence of the prophets.
2. This is a foreshadowing (typology) of Christ, the Word made flesh who dwells among us (John 1:14).

B. v.9—*Arise, go to Zarephath, which [belongs] to Sidon and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded there a widow to feed you.*

1. Elijah is told to go to a city outside Israel in the heart of a nation centered on Baalism (Jezebel's father, Ethbaal, was the King of Sidon [1 Kings 16:31]).
2. Like the story of Ruth, which shows that there were believing Gentiles during the time of the Judges (13th cent B.C.), the widow shows that there are believers outside Israel during the reign of the Kings of Israel in the

C. v.10—*So he arose and went to Zarephath and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, there was a widow gathering kindling. He called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a jar that I may drink."*

1. Following God's command to go into the heart of the country from which Baalism came, Elijah went to the widow God led him to.
2. Elijah is then the faithful Israelite, who does what Israel should have done by obeying God.

D. v.11—*And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."*

1. Elijah doesn't ask for much, but what he does ask for, he knows God will supply, as he had already learned in the desert.
- E. v. 12—*She said, "As Yahweh your God lives, I have nothing baked—only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a flask and now 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. The widow either acknowledges the God of Israel as a courtesy, recognizing Elijah is from there, or she believes in Yahweh.
 2. Jesus may be referring to **her genuine faith in Luke 4:24-26**
- F. v.13—*Elijah said to her, "Fear not! Go and do as you have said but make me from there a little cake first and bring it to me and for yourself and your son make [some] afterward.*
 1. The **command to "Fear Not"** is the command of all **angels** to people, thus Elijah is like an angel (lit.= "messenger") to the widow.
 2. The word of promise is offered through faith in God's word.
- G. v. 14—*For thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, 'The jar of meal will not be spent and the flask of oil will not fail until the day that Yahweh sends rain upon the earth.'*
 1. God withholds sustenance from His own unfaithful people while promising to sustain the Gentile widow.
 2. The blessings are the **fruit of faith**. The widow reaps what she first is willing to sow.
- H. v. 15—*She went and did as Elijah had said and he and the woman and her house ate [every] day.*
 1. The **"daily bread"** provision God gives enables His prophet to be taken care of along with those who help him.
 2. **Jesus also promised this** for His disciples in Mark 6:8-10.
- I. v.16—*The jar of meal was not spent and the flask of oil did not fail according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke by Elijah.*
 1. God warned Israel in **Deut. 32:21** that if they worshipped idols, He would turn His **blessings to the Gentiles**, which is fulfilled here.
 2. Paul quotes this is **Rom. 10:19** as well, arguing that the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles b/c the Jews would not believe so as to make them jealous and turn back to God to receive the blessings in Jesus!

III. N.T. background

- A. Elijah as a type of John the Baptist
 1. See Mal. 4:5; Matt 11:11-13; Mark 9:11-13.
 2. Jesus' coming will be preceded by Elijah, as John is said to be.
- B. The sign of the never empty oil jar:
 1. Early Christian Fathers allegorized oil as the "faith" of the believer. Here the widow, under the Holy Spirit's control, never runs out of faith.
 2. The meal as well, has a foreshadowing of Jesus as the Bread from Heaven that gives life, unlike the manna that did (John 6:32)
- C. Gentiles as recipients of God's blessings: Luke 4:25-26
 1. The widow gives her last meal to Elijah, much like the widow who gave her last mite (Luke 21:1-3).
 2. Jesus also commends this very widow as more faithful than those in Israel (Luke 4:24-26).

IV. Applications:

- A. Faithfulness is blessed by God. Not a Gospel of prosperity, but in Jesus, we can know that our needs will be met (Matt. 6:33).
- B. God desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Even the gentiles are blessed through faith in God (as God promised Abraham in Gen. 12). For us today, we should see all people as blood bought souls that Jesus loves.
- C. Times of testing are for strengthening our faith.

V. SERMON OUTLINE:

I. The Prophet Elijah—prepare by God

A. Elijah’s 3 tests:

<u>Test</u>	<u>In order to learn</u>
1. Being fed by ravens (17:1-6)	The Lord provides
2. Living in a Foreign land (17:7-16)	The Lord is in control everywhere
3. Raising the widow’s son from the dead (17:17-24)	The power of prayer

B. Elijah lived what Israel should have done.

C. There are no “miracles” in the Bible. Instead there are signs and wonders.

D. Elijah pointed the widow to the true God.

II. The widow as an type/example of the Church

A. She gave her all in faith.

B. She was promised the fruits of faith.

C. She foreshadowed Christ’s sacrificial gift.

III. Jesus’ gracious Love in our lives is seen in:

A. Faithfulness is blessed by God

B. God desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4)

C. Times of testing are for strengthening our faith.