

When Elijah came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." (1 Kings 17:10)

Gracious and merciful God, giver of all good things, you are the source of our life, hope, and faith. We thank you for everything you provide us with: food, water, clothing, shelter, family. We thank you most of all for the gift of your son Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

When Elijah spoke against King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, he had to flee to the wilderness, where God sustained him during a severe famine. God sent him to the house of a widow in Zerephath, whose generosity to the prophet sustained her and her son as well.

Read: 1 Kings 17:1-16

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

The Israelite Monarchy did not last long. With the death of King Solomon (931 B.C.), the time of the unified state came to an end. At that time, because of disputes in the royal house, God's people were split into a Northern Kingdom (Israel) and a Southern Kingdom (Judah), both of which began to fall into idolatry.

This period was the time of many prophets who spoke the Word of God to the leaders and people of both kingdoms. Many of the rulers in this time period turned away from the Lord.

Ahab, for example, was the seventh king of Israel. Both he and his queen, Jezebel, were greedy and idolatrous, leading the people to sin and pagan worship. They erected a temple for the false god Baal in Samaria. God sent Elijah to confront them about their worship of idols, and he suffered persecution for the Word of God.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was the prophet Elijah hiding out by the Cherith brook? Who was he afraid of? How did Elijah's faithfulness to God get him in trouble with leaders in his day?
2. In what ways or by what means did God provide for Elijah's needs in the wilderness? Would you call this a miracle? What eventually caused the brook to dry up?
3. A widow is a woman whose husband has died. Why was the widow in Zarephath collecting sticks? What did Elijah ask of the woman?
4. Under the circumstances, do you think this was a rude request? Why or why not? What did Elijah know that the woman didn't?
5. The town of Zerephath was outside the boundaries of Israel, far from Tishbe. Compare what Jesus said in Luke 4:25-26. What point did Jesus use the story of Elijah to illustrate? What might this story say about God's care for all people?
6. In verse 14, what did Elijah tell the woman that God had promised? Do you think that the woman believed God's promise? Or do you think she doubted and just went along with it anyway?
7. What does this story show us about God's faithfulness to his Word? How do you know that you can trust the promises God has made to you?
8. Read Psalm 111:1-6. What attitude does the writer of the psalm have? What reasons does he give for his confidence and faith?