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### Prayer and a National Crisis

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## PRAYER AND A NATIONAL CRISIS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES  
NUMBER 46  
JAMES 5:17-18

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JAMES 5:17-18 "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

We have already been studying Elijah in 1 Kings and now we take up the story again in 1 Kings 17:12.

1 Kings 17:12 "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, 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." We are studying a verb that appears in James 5:17 and 18 and it is "proseuchomai." It is used in James 5:17 and is an ingressive aorist which shows that this is the beginning of his prayer (that it would not rain) and then in verse 18 the same word is used in a culminative aorist to end his prayer (that it rain again). Both of these verses illustrate the tremendous power of prayer. In James 5:13 we saw the power of prayer when the believer prays for himself. Then in verses 14 and 15 we saw the power of prayer when the pastor-teacher prays for a believer who is out of fellowship. Here in this passage before us now we see the power of God's prophet when he prays for the nation that is in reversionism. Therefore, we must go back to 1 Kings and pick up the story in Chapter 17.

### The Second Dried Up Brook

We have already seen how the brook Cherith dries up and now we will see a second "dried up brook" situation. In 1 Kings 17:12 this widow of Zarephath is going to use the same words Elijah had used when he spoke to Ahab--"As the Lord thy God liveth." We know from this and other things in this story that this woman is a believer. Next she said, "I have not a cake" and the word for cake is "maog" and it means a round, flat piece of bread. All she had was a handful of flour. She was down to the bottom of the barrel. (Very much like ministers today who are preaching topical sermons and are giving forth their own philosophy and are down to the bottom of their sermon barrel. But I won't pause here to offer a sad devotional on that subject.) This woman also had some oil in a jar. What she is getting ready to do is to cook about what we would call one-tenth of a loaf of bread, and then sit down and die with her young son. The story goes on to say that she will collect "two sticks," which adds a little pathos to the situation. And the next line says, "that I may go and dress it," but as you know, you don't dress bread. The Hebrew word is "asah" and it means to cook it. "That we may eat it" is a kal imperfect of "akal" plus the word "muth" in the perfect tense and this means the end, death. Quite obviously this is a very depressing situation. Elijah had already faced one dried up brook in his own country, and now in this new land, he is face to face with a second dried up brook.

1 KINGS 17:13 "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."

"Fear not" is the kal, imperfect of "yawray" and it means "stop committing the mental attitude sin of failing to trust the Lord." In other words, her mental attitude sins have led her to despair. Both Elijah and this woman needed companionship and friendship and God is going to supply it for them both.

Now we have an unusual turn in the story. Elijah said to her, "Go and do as you have said" but then he adds something. He asks her to prepare a cake first for him, and then prepare for herself and her son. But if she made that glorified little cookie for him, there wouldn't be anything left for her and her son.

1 KINGS 17:14 "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." It is interesting to remember that "the Lord God Of Israel" is none other than Jesus Christ. "The barrel of flour shall not waste" and that's a kal, imperfect of "kalah" and it means "shall not be terminated, but will last on and on." Elijah didn't say that she and her son would not die, but the barrel of flour would not die. And the same promise is made for the jar of oil. The oil "will not fail" is a kal, imperfect of "chasar" and it means will not diminish. So, look what we have here. Elijah was telling her that she would use up the flour and the oil, but then the next day there would be just as much there as there had been the day before. In other words, use it all up today but there will be more for tomorrow.

#### Doctrine Is Adequate

The real truth behind this story is this--As believers we live one day at a time and we are to use all the doctrine we have for that day. Then when the next day dawns, there will be adequate provision of doctrine for the problems of that day. This is the whole purpose of the Book of James. Deposit doctrine in your mind, and then there will be more and more and more as the days flow by. In this verse before us, a prophet of God has communicated truth from God to another believer. The message was based on the truth and the authority from God. The woman immediately recognized that he was speaking with authority. For many months this woman, her young son and Elijah would live on the basis of this doctrinal truth.

1 KINGS 17:15 "And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days." The woman followed instructions carefully and God gave them food day after day after day. It probably was a period of from one to two years. All this time Elijah stayed in the guest chamber of her house with this woman and her young son. This verse says here "and did eat many days" but the Hebrew says that they ate day after day after day. In other words, they ate only one day at a time and that's all anyone can do. This is a picture of God's faithfulness to provide for our needs as the days come. He cares for his own one day at a time.

1 KINGS 17:16 "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." This is a beautiful photograph of the character of God. He provides for his own. Almost every day I think of this song--

"Be not dismayed, what-e'er betide, God will take care of you;  
Beneath his wings of love abide, God will take care of you.

No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you;  
Lean, weary one, upon his breast, God will take care of you."

It causes us to think of Matthew 6:25 and 33.

MATTHEW 6:25 "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

MATTHEW 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

1 KINGS 17:17 "And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him." Quite often when everything runs smooth, when we have all the bountiful provision of God's goodness, we forget his goodness and trouble must come to remind us of the source of our blessings. This is exactly what happened to this woman and her son. We need to constantly remember the words of Jesus, "Man shall not live by bread alone." The illness of this young man was so serious that we have the phrase "there was no breath left in him." The word for breath in Hebrew is "neshamah." This is exactly the same word we have in Genesis 2:7 when we read "and God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." So this means the spark of life. The words "breath left in him" is the perfect tense of "jathar" and it is in the passive voice and it means "he received death." The word used for this boy a little later in this passage is "naar" and this means a young man in his teens. Elijah will take him along as his servant later on in the story and there are those who believe this is none other than Obadiah who would later write the Book of Obadiah we have in the Scriptures.

1 KINGS 17:18 "And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?" I could write a volume on this verse but there are too many women in the audience for me to tell exactly all that the Hebrew says here. This woman said, "The Lord giveth, The Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." But quite obviously that is not what she said at all. "What have I to do with thee" is a Hebrew idiom for saying, "Elijah, you are to blame for all this!" Her words "O thou man of God" are words of sarcasm. She falls on her face and relates the sin of her life before she met Elijah. The words "call to remembrance" are a hiphil infinitive construct from "zakar" and it means "You have caused me to remember my sin." Then on top of that she is now going to blame Elijah for the death of her son. "Remember my guilt" is really what the Hebrew says. So, we have here the picture of a very angry woman, blaming Elijah for the tragedy that had come. "You have caused my son to die" is the real force of this language. Now why did this boy die? I'll tell you. They had been living off the amazing provision of God and this sudden calamity would be a quick reminder of the source of their blessings. For the time being both this woman and her son had forgotten the source of their blessings. God will use this experience to turn their attention back to him. This reminds us of 1 Peter 1:7-8. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:"

1 KINGS 17:19 "And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed." In reading between the lines I can almost imagine that Elijah thought--"Why, you old bat! What's the matter with you, have you forgotten the provision of God day after day after day?" But instead of giving expression to his amazement, he took the boy up to his room and placed him on his bed.

1 Kings 17:20 "And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" Now this prayer is in between the prayer of James 5:17 (when he prayed that it would not rain) and the prayer of James 5:18 (when he prayed that the rain would return). It is the same kind of a prayer based on faith. God always honors this kind of a prayer request. You recall the translation of that verse James 5:16 b, "The prayer of a righteous man has much power when it is operational." In this prayer Elijah reminds God of the promise he made to him when he brought him into the land. In essence it is a prayer that claims the promises of God.

1 KINGS 17:21 "And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again." Though Elijah was relying on God to restore this boy, he is going to do his part. He placed his warm, live body down on the body of the dead son. It is a picture of how the life of God returns into us and revives our dead soul and brings new life to us. This is going to be a beautiful forecast of how resurrection will be our experience after we die. The Hebrew says, "Let this young man's soul return to him again." The Hebrew word is "shubh" and it means return where it was before.

1 Kings 17:22 "And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived." "And he revived" is a kal, imperfect of "chajah" and it means "he lived again." This is resuscitation.

1 KINGS 17:23 "And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth." We have the words "See, thy son liveth" but the Hebrew says, "Look, thy son has begun to live again."

1 KINGS 17:24 "And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." In some ways this was a superficial woman. Elijah had been living there many months and had taught them many things. His life of faith and prayer had brought physical provision for them for months. This woman had to wait for a miracle of healing to realize that Elijah was a man of God. "By this I know" comes from the kal, imperfect of "yawdah" and it really means "I have finally figured it out. You are a man of God."

We now have a lapse of time between Chapters 17 and 18 of 1 Kings. At the beginning of Chapter 17, God told Elijah to go and hide. Now at the opening of Chapter 18 he will tell him to go and show himself to Ahab. We will complete this story on the power of prayer in our next study.