

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

SONS OF THE PROPHETS' WIDOW LESSON FIVE

by Sandy Harber

"And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil." II Kings 4:2b

Elisha wanted to help his student's widow protect her family and get out of debt. She did not have the money to pay the creditor. So Elisha asked, "What do you have?"

There was no purpose in dwelling on what she didn't have. To solve her problem Elisha needed to know what they had to work with. What were her assets? What could they use to get her out of debt? What did she have in the house? The widow's response was, "I don't have anything but a little pot of oil." Perhaps that pot of oil was the most valuable thing in her house. Surely she had a few pieces of furniture, some clothing, and a few cooking utensils. A pot of oil was not literally the only thing in her house.

It is possible that she had heard the story about how Elijah had assisted another widow during a three-year drought using a barrel of meal and a cruse of oil (I Kings 17:14). The woman's husband had attended one of the schools run by Elijah until he was taken up into heaven (II Kings). Perhaps Elijah had told his students how God had preserved his life as an encouragement for them to trust in the Lord at all times. The husband was so impressed by the story that he may have repeated it to his wife.

Whatever her reasoning, the widow's response was, "I have a pot of oil." Oil was a valuable commodity and had many uses in Israel. It was used in cooking, replacing butter or cooking fat. It could be mixed with flour and used for frying. Oil was also used for healing. The Good Samaritan poured oil and wine into the wounds of the injured man (Luke 10:34). When Jesus sent out the disciples two by two they took oil with them for healing (Mark 6:13). Olive oil was sometimes used as a beauty aid. The oil was rubbed on the skin or poured on the hair to make the skin and hair shine.

God's prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with olive oil (I Kings 19:16; Lev. 8:12; I Sam.16:13). That is, a prophet or priest would take his finger, dip it in the oil, and make a mark on the forehead of the chosen individual. The Hebrew word "Messiah" and the Greek word "Christ" both mean "anointed one." Note that Jesus was the only Person to ever fulfill all three roles. He came the first time as a Prophet (Mt. 13:57). He currently sits on the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest (Heb. 4:14). Some day He will return to reign as King over all the earth (I Tim. 6:14-15).

Oil was used to provide light. The Golden Candlesticks that were placed in the Tabernacle and Temple were fueled with olive oil. A priest would refresh the oil every morning and evening so that the light would never go out (Ex. 25:20-21). The ordinary clay lamps used by everyday people were also fueled with oil (Mt. 25:3, 8).

In Scripture, oil is a type, or symbol, of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that they (and all believers) were the light of the world (Mt. 5:14). It is the Holy Spirit that fuels that light. When we accept Jesus as our Savior God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to indwell our hearts (Jn. 7:39). It is through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives that we are able to light the way for unbelievers to come to Christ, the Light of the World (Jn. 8:12).

The adversities we face in life will make us stronger in the faith if we make the right choices. Then we can use what we learned by the experience to light the way for others. Our witness - our story, our testimony - of what Christ has done for us may lead someone else to Him. For that person we are a light shining through the darkness of sin. All our trials are designed to make us more like Jesus. Our little light is a reflection of Jesus, the Divine Light.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16