

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON TWENTY

by Sandy Harber

"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. 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?" I Kings 17:19b-20

Elijah took the child's body out of his mother's arms, carried him out of the house and up the outside staircase, which led to the roof. A single room dwelling built on the flat roof of the house was typical of homes in Phoenicia and Israel. This loft, or upper room, could serve as a storage area for the family. It could also be used for hospitality purposes, such as a guest bedchamber (II Kings 4:10) or a gathering area. Jesus and His disciples ate the Last Supper in such a room (Mark 14:14-15).

The widow of Zarephath had given the upper room to Elijah while he stayed in her home. He carried the child's body into his chamber and laid it on the bed.

Elijah immediately began to pray. He opened his prayer by questioning why God would bring this evil into the life of the woman who was sheltering him during the drought. The Hebrew word translated "evil" means "good for nothing." It can also mean "mischief; punish; vex." Elijah understood that God is sovereign. He controls everything. And He allowed this boy to die. No, not just allowed. He caused the death of the child. God slew the little boy, according to the prophet. Why?

How often we ask this question when we face difficult times. Why did God let this happen to me? Or, why did God do this to me? We search our memories for words or actions or thoughts that might have brought the Lord's chastening hand upon us. Like the widow, our first thought is that we are being punished for something bad we did. In our minds, a good and loving God would not cause us pain or allow us to be the recipient of evil. It makes sense to us that when we do what is right God will reward us. But when we sin He will punish us. That is exactly the thinking of the people in the widow's time. But our viewpoint is different than God's. We are limited by the here and now. God has no limitations. God's viewpoint is eternal. Every person and event from the beginning of time until eternity lies naked and open before Him (Heb. 4:13). He knows the beginning from the end (Is. 46:9-10). Sometimes tragedy and heartbreak are part of the big picture. These hard times may ultimately produce great good.

In his room, with the lifeless body of the widow's son stretched out on his bed, Elijah sought enlightenment. "Is the widow right that my presence has precipitated this tragedy?" he wonders. Had God brought evil on this house because of him?

Elijah was a prophet. A man of God. He prayed and things happened. God worked miracles through him. We hold him to a higher standard than we do ourselves because he was intimately acquainted with God. Surely he understood the workings of God better than we do. Yet here he is perplexed and questioning.

It is not wrong to seek understanding of what God is doing or how He is working in our lives. Trusting God means believing whatever comes into our lives is for our ultimate good. But, while accepting and cooperating with God's purpose, we still want to understand what that purpose is. How does God want me to react in this situation? What lesson is He trying to teach me? Searching for meaning isn't an act of unbelief. We do not doubt His love for us. Don't be afraid to seek answers. God may bring enlightenment.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matthew 7:7