

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON SEVENTEEN

by Sandy Harber

"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." I Kings 17:17

Elijah remained with the widow for about two and a half years. At some point during this time the widow's son became ill. The only timeline given is "after these things" referring to the previous verses describing how the widow and Elijah met and came to live together.

There are no specifics about the illness the child suffered. Did it come on him suddenly? Did he have a fever? An upset stomach? Was he in pain? The Hebrew words translated "sick" and "sickness" here aren't much help. Inherent in these words are the ideas of weakness, pain, affliction, disease, malady, calamity, and grief. We are told that the boy's sickness was "sore," which indicates "severe; strong in a bad sense" in the original Hebrew. This was a seriously ill child. He was so sick that he had "no breath left in him." He died. Interestingly the Hebrew word translated "breath" can mean just that: breath. The child was physically dead. However, that same Hebrew word can mean "soul" or "spirit." The phrase could be translated "he had no soul left in him" or "he had no spirit left in him." Since man is made up of a body, soul, and spirit this word covered the complete person. His body had ceased to function because he was no longer breathing. And his soul and spirit had vacated the body. The widow's son was at rest in paradise, in the bosom of Abraham.

How long was the child sick? Again, Scripture does not give us this detail. The telling of it is brief: just one quick verse. Perhaps the illness was equally brief, taking the child quickly.

The widow would have been frantically hovering over her young child, seeking to relieve his suffering and discomfort. She may have tried some home remedies that had worked in the past. Perhaps she consulted with neighboring women. Was there a doctor available and willing to visit this poor widow's house?

And what was Elijah doing during the sickness? He lived in the same house so he must have known when the child took ill. Did he pray for healing? If so that isn't recorded anywhere in Scripture. What we are told about Elijah's prayer life is that it was effective (James 5:16). Verse 22 states that the Lord heard Elijah's prayer when he prayed to restore the boy to life so He surely would have heard a prayer for healing as well. So it seems likely that this illness was sudden and the deadly result occurred rapidly after the onset of the disease. Or, it may be that Elijah prayer for healing and God said, "No." It wasn't God's will to heal the child from his illness. God had a more dramatic and memorable plan in mind for the boy.

Calamity can strike at any time. And it can come in any form. The widow faced a drought and starvation. But God saved her through the drought for two and a half years by providing never ending meal and oil. And God saved her from starvation by giving her bread daily. Then she faced another crisis: her only son became seriously ill. This time God did not save her from the situation. He said, "No." Or, more accurately, He said, "Not yet." In His time and in His way God intended to help the widow.

We all face difficult situations. If you think about it I'm sure you can come up with examples of God's working in your life where He has kept you "from" a crisis or seen you "through" a calamity. I know that I can. And we will all experience times when God says, "No" or "Wait a while." These are the hard answers. These are the times when our faith is tried. But these are also the times when we grow stronger spiritually. Don't let God's "No" discourage you. He has a better plan in mind. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you today; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever." Exodus 14:13