

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

SONS OF THE PROPHETS' WIDOW LESSON THREE

by Sandy Harber

"and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen." II Kings 4:1c

The widow of one of the Sons of the Prophets was in trouble. Her late husband owed money to a creditor which she could not repay. The creditor was threatening to take her two sons as hired servants to work off their father's debt. Under the Law of Moses the creditor had every right to do this.

According to Lev. 25:39-40 the people of Israel were not allowed to treat other Israelis as slaves or bondservants but as hired servants. And the period of servitude was limited to six years (Ex. 21:2). It was a common practice to enslave (so to speak) family members of the individual in debt. Another family member could redeem the enslaved relative by repaying the debt (Lev. 25:48). It appears that neither the widow nor her husband had a relative that was willing and able to do this.

The terms of the husband's debt is not given in Scripture. Did he borrow money from a relative or a friend? Why did he need the money? A prophet-in-training, as he was, probably did not have a steady income. But he had a wife and children to support. Perhaps he had been a farmer or a carpenter or bricklayer before he received God's call to be a prophet. Maybe the bills began to pile up after he abandoned his trade to enter the prophets' school. Whatever the cause, the young prophet died in debt.

Nothing is known of the creditor beyond his choice to take the prophet's children as hired servants to work off their father's obligation. He may have been a relative or friend of the prophet. If so, his behavior seems strange to us: to enslave the children of his former kinsman or friend. Perhaps he was a rich businessman who lent to those in need and there was no warm relationship between the young prophet and himself. Whatever the situation he comes off as the villain in this story. The mean man who wants to take children away from their mother and force them to work. This may not be a fair assessment. The creditor may have had bills to pay, too, He may have needed the money owed in order to care for his own family.

The widow found herself in a situation that was not of her own making. A situation beyond her control. No one was to blame. Her husband acquired the debt because he was trying to provide for his family. He did not expect to die and leave them with this debt. The creditor lent the money in good faith. He did not expect the prophet to die leaving him with the unpleasant task of retrieving his money from the man's grieving widow. He may not have been in a position to forgive the debt even if he was so inclined.

Things happen in this life that are no one's fault. But we have to deal with the reality that is. The best course of action is to turn to God for help. That is essentially what the widow did when she went to God's Prophet Elisha for assistance. God is in control. He allowed the situation. He will have made a way out or through the problem.

I can testify that God has helped me through each scary or uncomfortable situation that has arisen since my husband went to be with his Lord. I've learned how to do things I never thought I would have to do. I've become stronger and less fearful of the unknown. If you are living through a life-changing event be assured that God has allowed you to be in that situation for His purposes. He will be with you through the hard times and you will find yourself growing stronger and more capable. God uses trials to strengthen our faith. He is rubbing off our rough edges, burning off the dross, and refining us as silver.

*"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."
Psalm 50:15*