

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON EIGHTEEN

by Sandy Harber

"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 Kings 17:18

The widow of Zarephath was a victim of the ignorance of her day. Men attributed to the gods (including the one true God) human actions and motivations. Rich men, for example, were believed to be blessed by the gods/God because of their righteousness. On the other hand, illness and misfortune were viewed as the gods'/God's punishment for one's sins. This thought process was common among Jew and Gentile alike.

In the book of Job, the oldest book in the Bible, Job's friends were convinced that God was punishing Job for his sins (Job 4:7-9; 8:3-6, 20; 20:27-29). This philosophy continued to the time of Jesus. His Own disciples asked Him whether it was the blind man's own sin or that of his parents that caused him to be blind (John 9:2).

When the widow's son died, she immediately assumed that God was punishing her for her sins. She blamed the presence of Elijah in her house for bringing to God's remembrance her past sins. And as a result God killed her only child. Her guilt was overwhelming. Imagine her emotional state. It wasn't bad enough to lose her only child. Add to that the guilt that she was the cause of his death. Her sinful actions had brought down God's wrath upon her. The death of her son left the widow alone in the world. Had the boy lived and grown to manhood he would have taken on the responsibility of caring for his mother as she aged. Now she was completely alone with an unknown and bleak future awaiting her.

When bad things happen to us we often look for a cause. Is God punishing me for something that I did? Many people have asked themselves this question whether they will admit it or not. And, if we're honest, we can usually find something that we know we deserve to be punished for. That's when God's mercy and grace come into play.

Mercy occurs when God forgoes the punishment we have earned. Grace occurs when we receive blessing we did not earn. We have all sinned (Rom. 3:23). We all deserve punishment (Rom. 6:23). But God demonstrated His love for us by not giving us the punishment we deserve (mercy) but punishing His Son in our place so that our sin debt has been paid for us (grace). Of course, we need to believe this and accept Him as our Savior (Rom. 10:9-10).

The Bible doesn't tell us why God allowed the widow's son to sicken and die. He was already working in the woman's life. He sent His great prophet Elijah to live with her for two and a half years. Presumably, Elijah taught her many things about God. He surely taught her about sin and repentance. And God was working miraculously in her home every time she prepared a meal. After saving her from the crisis of a three and a half year drought, why did God allow the crisis of a deceased child? Perhaps so that she would experience an ever greater miracle than the extension of the meal and oil. Jesus told His disciples that the man was born blind so that his healing would showcase the works of God (John 9:3). The widow told Elijah after he raised her son that now she knows that what he's been telling her is the truth (I Kings 17:24).

God's ways are mysterious. Unless He explains Himself we can only speculate on His reasons for allowing unpleasant things in our lives. Even so, if we look we can find good in the midst of a bad situation. A seed is planted in an unbelieving heart. A lost lamb comes back into the fold. Someone's faith is strengthened. It may even be that God's purpose for allowing something bad into your life was not primarily for your benefit. The blind man lived in darkness his whole life before he met Jesus. But his healing, while beneficial for him, was primarily meant to authenticate Jesus' message. His miraculous works proved that He was sent by God. Therefore, people listened to His teaching and were saved. Whose life is being impacted by your story?

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Jeremiah 29:11