

# Elijah 1 – The Widow of Zarephath

These are the leaders notes from the Kielder Bible Study Group for the meeting that was held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012

We are starting a new topic for our Studies – The life and times of Elijah – A Man of faith, fire and power, loosely following the relevant chapters in 1 and 2 Kings

Lets read Psalm 12 Here as we can see in verse 1 David is feeling that there are very few faithful ones left in Israel – Something that I am sure Elijah would have associated with.

Before we look at him in a depth it would be good to put him in some form of historical context.

Elijah was around in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. What else was going on at that time in the rest of the world

Start of the Iron age in Europe, Homer was living in Greece, the Olmec in Mexico were building pyramids, it was the Zhou Dynasty in China.

As far as Israel goes we have a series of Kings

- David 1011 – 971
- Solomon 970 – 930
- Country split into two – the south Judah, and the north, Israel
- Just considering the kings of Israel
- Jeroboam 930 -910
- Nadab 910 – 909
- Baasha 909 -886
- Elah, 886 BC-885 BC
- Zimri, 885 BC
- Omri, 885 BC-874 BC and

then Ahab. The king in power during Elijah's time. So lets look at 1 Kings 16 29 – 33

We have two problems here

Firstly his wife – Do we know anything about her – Jezebel 2 Kings 9 v 22 describes her *How can there be peace,” Jehu replied, “as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?”*

Secondly who he worshipped – lets look at Exodus 20 1-6 specifically v4

Ashera (re Ashera Pole) was the consort of Baal and a goddess.

Then 1 Kings 16 v34 – Q Why was this a problem

A The text implies that they had rebuilt the walls around the town, which was a problem see Joshua 6 v26

*At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: "Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho:*

*"At the cost of his firstborn son  
he will lay its foundations;  
at the cost of his youngest  
he will set up its gates."*

So this is the context for Elijah. The name Elijah means "The Lord is my God".

1 Kings 17 v1 – The text says that he comes from Tishbe – This is in the Northern Trans Jordan Area. Elijah goes to the king and tells him that there is going to be a drought. Q what do we notice about what he said, or rather how he said it.?

A It was direct – No beating about the bush – sugar coating it as often said.

Baal was supposedly the god of fertility and lord of rain clouds – ie God was showing how powerless he was.

We then need to fill in the gap in the story with our imagination. Presumably King Ahab is far from pleased, and Elijah needs to hide.

1 Kings 17 2-6

Here the text reveals a process that God uses so often through the Bible and even now days. He works in a step by step process. Do one thing then God reveals the next, rather than giving the big picture right at the start. Q Besides this what else do we notice about this passage ?

A The use of the ravens – They were regarded as an unclean bird – Leviticus 11 v13-19 lists such birds

*13 "These are the birds you are to regard as unclean and not eat because they are unclean: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, 14 the red kite, any kind of black kite, 15 any kind of raven, 16 the horned owl, the screech owl, the gull, any kind of hawk, 17 the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl, 18 the white owl, the desert owl, the osprey, 19 the stork, any kind of heron, the hoopoe and the bat.*

Q Do we notice anything else about the ravens? - A Normally a raven is a scavenger and eats food, so it would be not part of its normal nature to provide food.

1 Kings 17 v7- 11

Q How do you think Elijah must have felt when the water dried up v7? A Pretty fed up?? would be a normal reaction.

Zarephath was around 100 miles away. So it was no walk in the park. Zarephath was also in the area that Jerzebel came from as the King of Sidon was her Father. An area where Baal was being promoted.

Q What would we think if God told us to walk 100 miles into the enemies land?

1 Kings 17 v12- 16

Q How do we think the widow felt being asked to use up her seemingly last food for Elijah?

The fact that she was starving due to the drought showed that the whole area was suffering, and that Elijah's proclamation of God's message had come true.

1 Kings 17 v17-24

Q What do we notice about Elijah's prayer? A It is not half hearted He had faith

Q How do Elijah's actions compare to those of David who also prayed for a dead child?  
David fasted

2 Samuel 12:23

*23 But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.*

Q How does the woman's way of addressing Elijah as a "Man of God" change from v18 to v24 A sarcasm to believing what she says.

Q Can we think of some reasons why God sent Elijah to live with the widow and her son for three years?

- God cares for widows
- Gods timing is not our timing
- Gave Elijah time to be with God

One of the commentators I have read compares Israel then with Britain now. He also goes on to compare some churches with the worship of Baal. Saying that their version of Christianity has been so watered down to be relevant to today's society that it is not really Christianity.

Q What do we think about this?

Other commentators have mentioned the Asherah pole that Ahab set up and asked the question How does this relate to statues in our churches today.

Q What do we think about this?

## Lessons for us from these passages on Elijah

1. God reveals his purpose step by step – often not showing us the big picture
2. God often takes time
3. There is nothing wrong with being strong, clear and direct in our prayers
4. The start of a journey of faith.