

# Elijah and the widow of Zarephath



1 Kings 17:6-24

*At the brook of Cherith, Elijah was safe from Jezebel's persecution. When the brook dried up, God ordered the prophet to go to Zarephath where a widow would look after him. A miracle saved the widow, her son and Elijah from starvation. At that time the son became ill and died. Elijah brought the boy back to life. The widow's faith in the true God was strengthened.*

24

The children's faith in God's help is strengthened.  
God keeps his word and his promises.

**F**or some time Elijah has been living in the remote place to which God has sent him. Ravens provide him with bread and meat and he drinks from the brook of Cherith. But the water in the brook is steadily getting less. The sun has burnt down mercilessly and no drop of rain has fallen since he has been here. The Lord now speaks to Elijah: "Get up and go to Zarephath near Sidon! Remain there, I have instructed a widow to look after you!" Elijah has to go to the very country from which Jezebel originally came: the country where the god Baal is worshipped! But he obeys the Lord and goes without being afraid.

After a long and arduous journey, he arrives at the gates of the city of Zarephath. This region is also suffering from drought. A thin, sunken-cheeked woman is bending down in the blazing heat collecting firewood. Elijah addresses her: "Would you please bring me a little water, I am thirsty." When the woman gets up to go and fetch it, Elijah calls after her: "Bring me some bread as well, please!" The woman turns round, looks at Elijah sadly and replies: "As surely as the Lord your God lives, I don't have any bread, only a handful of flour in a jar, and a little oil in a jug. I'm gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son; it will be our last meal and then we shall have to die." Eli-

jah pricks up his ears. What did the woman say? "The Lord your God lives," those were her very words! In this strange country a woman lives who knows the true God! This must be the widow of whom the Lord has told him.

Elijah says to the woman: "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain."

1

The woman believes Elijah's words. She goes home to bake the small round loaves of bread. She makes a fire, then shakes the last flour out of the jar, adds the remainder of the oil and kneads the dough. After she has given Elijah to eat, she suddenly stops short in amazement and joy. She just took the last of the flour, but there is more in the jar, and the jug of oil is not empty either! She still has flour and oil! She gladly bakes more bread for Elijah, herself and her son. From that day on they no longer have to starve, in spite of drought and famine.

One day the widow's son becomes gravely ill and dies soon afterwards. In her anguish and despair the mother goes to Elijah, wringing her hands, and cries: "Why are you here, man of God? Have you come so that God can remember all my sins and punish me by taking my son?"

2

Elijah understands the mother's grief and says softly: "Bring me your son." Filled with pity and compassion, he takes the dead child from her arms and carries it to his room where he places it on the bed. Elijah knows God and therefore knows that he is lord over life and death. That is why he has an unshakeable belief and trust in him. He kneels down in front of the bed and prays fervently: "Lord, my God, this widow has received me here in faith and now you take away her son?" He



goes and bends over the boy and breathes new life into him, and pleads: "Lord, my God, let the soul of this boy return to him!"

Then a great miracle takes place in that little room: the heart of the boy starts beating again although he was already dead. He now reopens his eyes. Joyfully and with deep thankfulness, Elijah takes the child back to its mother and says: "Look, your son is alive!" The mother can hardly believe her eyes. She is overjoyed and sobs: "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that I can trust God who speaks through you."

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*Elijah lived in the house of the widow of Zarephath. Through a miracle they did not have to starve during the time of drought and famine. When the widow's son died, Elijah brought him back to life.*

- 1 What would the children do if they were in the widow's position? What might have been the reasons that the widow obeyed Elijah? (Pity, obedience). To do what Elijah asked of her required extraordinary faith and trust.
- 2 We discuss the mother's reaction. What feelings motivate her? (Grief and despair at the death of her son, anger and disappointment directed at Elijah. She had done everything Elijah had asked of her. Was this now the thanks she got?)
- 3 We discuss the picture. What are the mother's feelings now? (The widow experienced God's help, but she first had to believe Elijah. Elijah experienced that the Lord stood by him and acknowledged him as his servant.) We, too, may experience God's help time and again.
- 4 The children can draw Elijah at the brook as the ravens care for him.