

# THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

## LESSON 12: JEHOVAH & THE NATIONS (1KINGS 17; 2KINGS 5)

Luke records that after His baptism and subsequent temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went to Galilee and taught in the synagogues (Luke 4.14-15). Naturally, Jesus would make His way to Nazareth, but as we know the encounter did not go well. Jesus told those assembled that “no prophet is welcome in his hometown” and then proved His point by offering two examples: “But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke 4:25–27, NASB95)

In our last lesson we focused on God’s sovereignty over the nations. His sovereignty was seen in His anointing of foreign kings (2Kings 8.7-15), in His delivering the faithful from their threat (2Kings 6) and in the execution of His judgment (2Kings 3). Jehovah is more than a local or national deity; He is Lord over all. And since He is Lord over all, He also cares for the nations. The two examples given by Jesus give proof to the fact that Jehovah cares for the nations.

### THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH (1KINGS 17.8-24):

#### Notes from the text:

- Vs. 9, Zarephath lay on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon. It is important to note that this is the home territory of Jezebel, and thus the home territory of Baal (see 1Kings 16.31-32).
- Vs. 10, “Based on the statements in the prologues of the Ur-Nammu Code and the Code of Hammurabi, it is clear that kings considered it part of their role as “wise rulers” to protect the rights of the poor, the widow and the orphan. Similarly, in the Egyptian Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the plaintiff begins by identifying his judge as “the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow.” If a god is going to demonstrate his role as a king, one clear way of doing so is to show his concern for the vulnerable by caring for the needs of a widow in desperate need.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 14, grain and oil were two major exports of the city of Zarephath, so this shows just how severe the famine was in the land.
- Vs. 16, “There is no indication of a massive supply, simply that the ingredients were



always on hand as they were needed. Each use of the flour and oil would require faith that God would meet daily need (cf. Matt 6:11). Thus both Elijah and the widow learned to put their continued faith and trust in the Provider rather than in the provision." (Expositors Bible Commentary)

- Vs. 18, "Prophets were often considered dangerous and having one around posed considerable risk. The gods could be harsh taskmasters as often as they could be generous benefactors, and the prophets represented them. Additionally, if the prophet were to become angered or offended at any little thing, he might, in an uncontrolled moment, pronounce some sort of curse that would inevitably come true. The woman assumes that her child's death is punishment from some presumed (though unknown) offense that has come to the attention of the deity because of the prophet's presence. She had thus far benefited from Elijah's presence, but now she judges that the cost was too high." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 21, "In Mesopotamian incantation literature the touching of part to part is a means by which demons exercise power over their intended victims—it is the idiom of possession. In this belief, vitality or life force can be transferred from one body to the other by contact of each part. By imitating the procedure believed to be used by demons, the prophet is able, through the power of Yahweh (notice the prayer), to drive the demons out and restore the boy's life." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 22, "Part of the profile of fertility gods was the dying and rising cycle that was related to vegetation and to the seasons. The deity would "die" during the winter months and descend to the netherworld. He would be brought back out of the netherworld and restored to life in the spring to bring fertility back to the land. His power to enable fertility extended beyond crops to animals and people as well. As a god who regularly returned from death, it was believed that these fertility gods also had the power to occasionally restore life to someone who had died... Therefore, by restoring the boy's life, Yahweh is again showing his power in the realm considered to be Baal's central arena." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

### Takeaways:

1. The Lord was concerned for someone who was not yet a worshiper of His. Note the widow's address of Elijah in vs. 12, "as the Lord your God lives". Jehovah was Elijah's God, not hers.
2. Jehovah did what Baal could not. Not only did He provide a constant supply of flour and oil (vss. 14-16), but He raised the woman's son from the dead (vs. 22).
3. The widow demonstrated faith in Jehovah. This faith was seen in her willingness to make Elijah's cake first (vs. 13) and every day afterwards as the supply of flour and oil was replenished (vss. 14-16). And even though she struggled at the death of her son, faith was evident in her giving the child to Elijah (vs. 19).
4. The end result was that God was glorified (vs. 24). Elijah was proven to be a man of God, and the word of God was proven to be true!

## NAAMAN (2KINGS 5)

### Notes from the text:

- Vs. 8, "he was a leper"
  - » "Those studying the language have concluded that the term often translated "leprosy" is more accurately rendered "lesion," or, less technically, "scaly skin." Such

patches could be swelled or weeping, as well as flaking. Similar broad terminology also exists in Akkadian, where the Babylonians likewise considered it an unclean condition and the punishment of the gods... The condition discussed in the text is not presented as contagious. Descriptions would suggest that modern diagnoses would include psoriasis, eczema, favus and seborrheic dermatitis, as well as a number of fungal-type infections." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

- » "An interesting analogy is found in an Old Babylonian omen text that says that 'if the skin of a man exhibits white pusu-areas or is dotted with nuqdu dots, such a man has been rejected by his god and is to be rejected by mankind.' A neo-Assyrian text similarly maintains that 'if a man has the surface of his flesh covered with black and white spots, the disease is the mamitu (curse/tabu).' (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)



- Vs. 5, "Ten talents equals thirty thousand shekels, about seven hundred fifty pounds of silver. The six thousand shekels of gold equals about one hundred fifty pounds (one gold shekel equaled fifteen silver shekels). Converted to today's buying power, it would be in the vicinity of three-quarters of a billion dollars." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 6, the Syrian king probably assumes that Elisha works for the king of Israel, because this is how it worked in Syria.
- Vs. 7, the Jordan River was ~40 miles from Samaria.
- Vs. 18, "Rimmon (=Ramman, "thunderer") is believed to be a title of the storm god, Hadad, the head of the Aramean pantheon." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 23, "Considering what Naaman had been prepared to offer, Gehazi's request is extremely modest, yet it is still a considerable sum. A talent of silver is three hundred years of wages (for someone making thirty to thirty-five thousand a year, that would be like getting about ten million dollars), and Naaman doubles it. Gehazi is trying to set himself up for life." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

### Takeaways:

1. God orchestrated the cleansing of Naaman (vss. 1-2).
  - a. I've often used the story of Naaman to show how many different roles were involved in Naaman's cleansing. There was the servant girl who pointed the way, the prophet who gave God's instructions, the servant who encouraged obedience and ultimately Naaman who yielded.
  - b. But it was God who brought about Naaman's cleansing. It was the Lord who gave Naaman victory (vs. 1), thus it was God who brought Naaman into contact with the young girl. Yes, each party still needed to do their part, but the account shows that it was God who desired the cleansing of Naaman.

2. Naaman struggled to believe, but ultimately he had to submit to God's will (vss. 11-14).
3. The result: God was glorified.
  - a. Naaman was now a converted worshiper of Jehovah (vss. 17-19)
  - b. Gehazi's greed was an attempt to take glory away from Jehovah, thus Gehazi was inflicted with the dreaded disease (vss. 20-27).

### JESUS' USE OF THESE EXAMPLES (LUKE 4.16-30)

Recall that Jesus read from Isaiah 61.1-2 in the synagogue, a passage where the Lord promised that the gospel would bring freedom and healing. Jesus then proclaimed that "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (vs. 21). It was this remark that brought about the ire of many and Jesus' declaration that He would be rejected by His own people. Where would He go? While Jesus worked primarily in Judea, it's of note that most of His ministry was in Galilee, an area decidedly less "Jewish" than Jerusalem. And ultimately, Jesus' followers would be charged with taking the gospel to all the world (Matthew 28.18-20). Jehovah had already shown that He was concerned for the nations by sending Elijah to the widow of Zarephath and by sending Naaman to Elisha. Now Jehovah had sent His Son to bless the whole world! (John 3.16)