

Widow With the Jar of Oil – A Study of Provision

Widows of the Old Testament

Teacher/Facilitator Study Guide

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Italics indicate the text in the Student's Study Guide.

**Indicates the author's study helps for the teacher/facilitator.*

Review of Jezebel

In our study of Jezebel, we saw how her evil influence affected her husband and children into the fourth generation. She was an instrument of idolatry, wickedness, death and destruction, as well as apostasy (turning away from God) to the nations of Israel and Judah.

God used His courageous servants who obeyed His Word – the prophet Elijah to resist idol worship and the priest Jehoiada and his wife, Jehosheba (Jezebel's granddaughter) to preserve the royal line of David and the ancestry of Jesus Christ from destruction. We contrasted Jezebel with Jehosheba, who rescued the small child Joash and hid him, caring for him for six years until he could become the King of Judah.

In the past weeks, we have considered how our conduct and attitudes affect those around us: children, family and friends.

a. Are we self-seeking, bitter, angry, jealous, revengeful, or do we exhibit trust, courage, love and forgiveness?

b. Do we trust in God and live it out by prayer, bold obedience, sacrifice and love induced willingness to be used by God to make a difference?

c. Would you share how you have encouraged someone you influence? Did it make a difference to them?

Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2).

Prayer

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The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

Lamentations 3:25-26.

The Lord is good—all the time. All the time—the Lord is good!

*Hebrew word for **provision** – kuwl (kool). To maintain – Guide, be present, provide sustenance.*

1. *In our last study, God told Elijah that he was to be succeeded by Elisha, as a prophet of Israel. Elisha was to become Elijah's attendant until God took Elijah to heaven.*

2. *Prior to Elijah's home going, he and Elisha were met by three different groups of men from the Schools of Prophets. The schools were institutions that were established for the instruction and training of prophets in Bethel, Gilgal and Jericho. These students were called "sons of the prophets," due to their close association with Elijah and Elisha (pg. 152-152).*

3. *Each group met them as Elijah made his last journey through the land, to be called home to God. When Elijah reached the river Jordan he took off his cloak/mantle, the symbol of his prophetic office, rolled it up and struck the water. The water separated so the men walked across on dry ground (2 Kings 2: 8).*

**If you recall from previous lessons, God uses miracles to emphasize his power and goodness in doing something that is impossible to do by human strength. God may use it to convince unbelievers that he is God and convince believers of his presence and power.*

4. *Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of his spirit. He was told that if he saw Elijah when he was taken from him, the double portion would be his (2 Kings 2:10).*

5. *While they were walking and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Did Elisha see him go (2 Kings 2:11-12)? Yes*

6. Elisha picked up his mantle, walked to the river, struck it as Elijah had and it separated. That was the beginning of many miracles God enabled Elisha to perform by God's power, many more than Elijah (pg. 153).

Read 2 Kings 4:1

7. The wife of a man from the company (school) of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves."

*Historical Jewish documents, the Targums (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures) and the Antiquities by Josephus, state that this woman was reported to be the widow of Obadiah, the manager of King Ahab's household. See 1 Kings 18:3-4, 13.

8. Obadiah, a devout believer who worshiped God, hid one hundred prophets in caves to keep them alive when Queen Jezebel gave orders to kill all of God's prophets. He may have incurred great debt to provide food for all of them (WOT pg. 154).

*This Obadiah was not the prophet who wrote the Old Testament book of Obadiah.

Consider – Obadiah was willing to pay a price to be obedient to God's voice and calling for him. Are we willing to suffer or take risk to be obedient to God's directive to us?

9. Elisha was acquainted with this widow's late husband and as the leader of the prophets, Elisha cared about his widow and sons. The creditor was using the Hebrew law to take the man's family as slaves to pay off his debt. Leviticus 25:39-41, Matthew 18:25.

Discuss – Losing her children due to debt threatened this widow.

a. What are some things that threaten us today?

b. When God allows us to suffer, what assurance do we have that He is aware of what we are going through and will help us?

2 Corinthians 9:8, 12:9; Philippians 4:19; Romans 8:28, 37-39.

Read 2 Kings 4:2

10. What two questions did Elisha ask her? a. How can I help you?

b. Tell me, what do you have in your house?

11. *How did the widow answer? “Your servant has nothing there at all, except a little oil”.*

*Elisha, with wisdom, wanted to use something common to the widow to enable her to see and understand God’s hand at work in her home. Handing her money would not have helped her to grow spiritually by participating in God’s provision. Give people a fish and they have food for a day. Teach them how to fish and they have food for a lifetime.

Read 2 Kings 4:3-4

12. *Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars and as each is filled, put it to one side”*

*Elisha wanted her and her sons to take part in an act of faith by collecting empty jars and in the privacy of their home, experience God’s miracle in filling the jars with the oil that flowed from God’s supply providing for their financial need.

Read 2 Kings 4:5-6

13. *She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.*

*God supernaturally caused the oil to flow to fill all the jars they collected. He also led them to collect as many jars as they needed to care for their financial need. His wisdom is far above ours.

Discuss: God is a God of miracles.

- a. *Why are we so slow to trust God to meet our every need?*
 - b. *If we would trust God more for provision, would we receive more?*
- You do not have because you do not ask God (James 4:2c).***

Read 2 Kings 4:7

14. *The widow reported back to Elisha what they had done and the result.*

- a. *Where did he send her? To sell the oil and pay her debts.*
- b. *What other instruction did he give them? To live on the rest.*

*What a rich reward for their faith. Elisha took time to instruct them so they could take steps of faith and experience God's miracle in their lives. God reproduced oil, which raised money to buy their freedom and live a lifestyle free from debt. He provided above and beyond what they asked for or even hoped.

15. *Read Ephesians 3:20. What does this verse tell us God is able to do?*
Immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work in us.

Discuss: *What does that mean to you?*

*It gives God pleasure to use His power in our lives when we delight to give Him the glory.

16. *The Northern Kingdom of Israel existed two hundred and fifty five years from 975 BC-720 BC (pg. 156). a. How many kings did Israel have? Twenty two. b. How many prophets of God? Nine. c. Who were the most renowned prophets of Israel? Elijah and Elisha. d. What brought an end to the Northern Kingdom? Israelites were captured and carried into exile in Assyria.*

*There is no mention of the Northern Kingdom ever returning to their homeland. However, there was a remnant that hid or escaped and stayed in the land. See 2 Chronicles 30:6-9.

17. *Judah (the Southern Kingdom) existed for three hundred and eighty seven years from 975 BC – 588 BC (pg. 156)? a. How many kings did Judah have? Twenty. b. How many prophets of God? Twelve. c. Who was their most renowned prophet? Isaiah. d. Who captured Judah and carried them into exile? Babylonia. e. What happened to the Temple and Jerusalem in 588 B.C.? They were destroyed! f. Why did the captivity and destruction take place (Malachi 2:11-12)? Because they forsook the LORD and turned to the customs of their heathen neighbors and worshiped other Gods.*

*Solomon married foreign women and was drawn away to idol worship. The kings after him followed his practice until God brought judgment with captivity and enslavement.

**We can be enslaved by our practice of things that God forbids. The enemy's traps are baited with temptations to do things our way instead of God's way. God sees the heart and recognizes our motivations and attitudes. He knows the true intent of the heart.

Consider: *Does our faith stand strong or is it weak and easily lead astray? When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth (Luke 18:8)? And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6b).*

18. *How long was Judah in captivity in Babylon?* Seventy years.

19. *When King Cyrus of Persia captured Babylon, how many people from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, along with the Levites, did he allow to return to their homeland?* 7,337 people

*They returned to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as an everlasting possession. The Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel and completed in about 516 B.C. and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt under the supervision of Nehemiah around 450 B.C.

*The Eternal God, who holds the heart of the King in his hand and turns it to fulfill his plan in Proverbs 21:1, knows and understands the needs of widows and orphans. He who controls nations and elements was able to make the flow of oil increase to provide financially for an impoverished and fearful widow, about to see her sons become slaves.

Read Malachi 3:6-12

*Malachi wrote these words about 17 years after the Hebrew people returned to their homeland. The Hebrew people were about to experience four hundred more years of God's judgment as a result of their disobedience. They were robbing God of love, honor and obedience.

20. *Tithes and offerings are an outward demonstration of love for and obedience to God. Disobedience brings curses and obedience brings blessings. God desires to lavishly reward demonstrated love and obedience with His rich blessings (pg. 158-159).*

Consider: *How do you demonstrate your love and obedience to God?*

Read Malachi 3:1a

21. *Who do you think the messenger is, that this prophecy speaks of? John the Baptist. Who does it prophesy will come to His Temple? The Lord Jesus will come to His Temple.*

*As the hope of the Hebrew people for a Messiah/Deliverer grew dim in their apostasy, they were reminded by Malachi that God would fulfill His promise. They were to enter a dark period of four hundred years with no prophet and their Temple would again be destroyed (AD 70). Before that destruction, God would shine a heavenly beacon upon a lowly stable and He (God) would become flesh and dwell among the human race. John 1:12 tells us “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus was brought to the Temple to be presented before the Lord God, came to the Temple with his parents at twelve years of age and conversed with the Hebrew teachers of the Law and taught in the Temple many times during his ministry.

Personal Application

22. *Please read Malachi 3:6 and copy the first sentence. I, the LORD, do not change.*

*God is the same today as he was two thousand years ago. He knows your need at this moment. He longs for you to turn to Him for help. When you express your desire for His help and direction, He will respond.

23. *There are two things to take into account:*

- a. God responds to right motives and a heart that trusts Him.
- b. God responds according to His will.

*He may, for a reason unknown to us, desire for us to wait, or to experience a certain trial for a period of time. In thirty years of widowhood, I have, more times than not, had prompt provision in answer to prayer.

**I have also waited beyond deadlines and later understood the reason for His delay. I have experienced “No” answers and God took me through the dreaded trial, in which I learned about His love and sufficiency in the face of disappointment.

24. *The key is to trust our loving Father to do what is best for us and not determine to run ahead or turn away from Him and seek our own way by human devices or strength.*

*God provided for the widow in today’s lesson far beyond what she hoped for. That has been my experience as well.

25. *What is your need today?*

Tell your Heavenly Father about it and ask Him to provide wisdom and what you need, in the way He chooses. Ask Him to teach you how much He loves you (and your children and grandchildren, if you have some).

26. *Do we rob God today of the love, honor and obedience He desires?*

27? *How are you showing your love for Him?*

God has always had a remnant of people who remain true to Him. Using a golden calf or Asherah pole to enhance their worship, led those who were disobedient into idol worship and apostasy, which led them into captivity. God relates to those with a pure heart who love, trust and obey Him.

Exercise: *Consider the need you are most concerned about in your life. Talk to the Lord about that need. Commit the need to Him, trust Him with it and ask Him to carry out His plan to take care of it. Pray for direction to know what He wants you to do about it. Be willing to wait until He shows you what to do. He will make it clear to you.*

Prayer