

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 2, 2022 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



“Advance Training at Zarephath”
1 Kings 17:8-16

⁸Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁹“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.” ¹⁰So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.” ¹¹And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” ¹²So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” ¹³And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. ¹⁴For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’” ¹⁵So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.-1 Kings 17:8-16 (NKJV)

With these principles in mind, here are some questions I ask myself as I study the Scriptures:

6 Questions to ask yourself as you study Scripture to help you apply it:

- 1. How does this passage apply to my life?**
- 2. What changes must I make?**
- 3. How will I carry out these changes?**
- 4. What will be my personal prayer concerning this truth?**

5. Which verse(s) in this section should I memorize?
 6. What illustration or word picture will help me remember what I've read?
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While many people like to stick with the New Testament when it comes to reading the Bible, I must confess that the Old Testament has a special place in my heart. I love reading the testimonies of faith heroes like Abraham, Moses, David, Esther, Joseph and more. Their lives are so inspiring and if we're honest, filled with enough drama and conflict to keep me on the edge of my seat. One of my all-time favorite testimonies in the Bible is that of the Prophet Elijah, that we have been looking at the last few weeks as we began our study on his life.

This man was on fire for God. Literally at his request the Lord answered with a consuming fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-38). Elijah was sent on mission from God to turn the Israelites hearts back to their One True God. When we first read of Elijah, the Israelites have been worshiping both the God of their ancestors, who is the One True Living God, and the false God Baal. Enough was enough. God sent Elijah to confront their wavering faith and lead them to make a decision.

4 Key Facts About Elijah to Remember:

- (1) **We don't know much about his past** - When Prophets are first introduced in the Bible, we are usually given some family lineage. Not so with Elijah. We only know he comes from a town called Tishbe... a relatively unknown place. We don't actually know it's exact location today. Archeologists have never been able to find it. It was so small and perhaps insignificant that what did exist as a town/community is buried beneath the sands of time and/or no longer exists. It's almost like Elijah comes out of nowhere. However, he could not have come at a better time. At this point the Israelites are the furthest from God that they had ever been. They desperately needed Elijah's ministry more than his history. *What significance might this have for our own lives?*
- (2) **Elijah became depressed to the point of wanting to die** - After that miraculous consuming fire on Mount Carmel (that we will get to in a few weeks), Elijah enters an extreme depression. So much so, he wants to die. (1 Kings 19:3-4) Elijah was hoping that Mount Carmel would cause a national change in Israel but it didn't. Not like he thought it would and now the Queen at the time, Jezebel, plotted to kill him. Not quite the outcome he was expecting at all. He lost hope, passion, and the desire to live. However, God encourages Elijah and speaks with Him on Mount Horeb. (1 Kings 19:9-18) After this Elijah is able to get out of this severe funk and continue on with his ministry even better than before.
- (3) **Elijah never died** - As I just shared with you, one of the reasons Elijah wanted to die was because he was afraid Queen Jezebel was going to kill him. But Jezebel's threat was a straight out lie. She would never kill Elijah. In fact, Elijah never even died. He was whisked up into Heaven by a whirlwind. (2 Kings 2:11).
- (4) **Elijah's key strategy was prayer** - Elijah performed miraculous acts in the name of the Lord, but James 5:17-18 reminded us that he was an ordinary man just like us. *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."* - James 5:17-18ESV There was one strategy Elijah used that empowered him beyond belief and that was prayer. One time while living with a widow and her son, the son died and Elijah prayed over the boy and he was brought back to life. (1 Kings 17:21-22)

When Elijah called on the Lord for fire on Mount Carmel he said a simple prayer. (1 Kings 18:36-37)

Elijah reminds us any life that trusts in God through prayer will make a significant impact in the Kingdom of God despite our history, who we are, or how we feel. If there is anything we learn from Elijah it's that prayer is truly powerful.



Elijah's basic training before God took place alongside the dried-up brook Cherith, but that was not the end of his days spent in the crucible. The Lord moved him into advanced training at Zarephath, as we shall see next. While there, he learned more about standing firm and strong even though surrounding circumstances seemed virtually impossible. Two situations forced him to lean hard upon God

2 Situations at Zarephath that Forced Elijah to Lean Upon the Lord:

- (1) The **absence of enough food**
- (2) The **death of the widow's son**

In this study we will consider the first of these...

REVIEW OF CHERITH (1 Kings 17:1-7)

Before continuing, let's go back and pick up two details from our last study that will help us see the early stages of God's work in the prophet Elijah's life... a work begun at Cherith and to be continued at Zarephath.

2 Details to Remember from Elijah's Basic Training at Cherith:

- (1) **God will provide for us no matter what happens** – The term or name comes from a Hebrew verb meaning “to cut or to cut off or down.” It has the idea of whittling away, cutting away, tearing away, or filing away at an individual or at something. This is what happened to Elijah beside the brook. God's work on him did not cut him off from His love, but from involvements and enjoyments Elijah had previously known. Remember that at Cherith God took care of all of Elijah's needs with water from the brook and food daily from the Ravens. But the brook dried up and the food supply dried up too because of the drought. In the midst of this God was teaching and training Elijah to know that God would take care of his needs and could be trusted.
- (2) **God will prepare us for no matter what is ahead** – He may take us through different and varying methods of training and preparing us, but He doesn't just call us to a task and desert us. He prepares us to do the job, and then walks with us through it all. Don't be surprised if training and preparing takes us to desert places, hard times, or challenging circumstances. Sometimes his methods involved these as basic training for a task.

REVIEW: How does God prepare us?

1. **Sometimes He prepares us through times of temptation (Matthew 4:1-11)** Jesus when through a time of preparation for His earthly ministry just after His baptism in the Jordan. God took Him to the desert and there He was tempted. We read in Matthew 4:1-3 “*1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”* **How might times of “temptation” and especially our victory over it prepare us for living the Christian life and His purposes for our life as believers?**
2. **Sometimes He prepares us through times of trial (James 1:2-4)** James, the half brother of Jesus, reminded us that we may go through trial in our life to prepare us. He said in James 1:2-4, “*2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work,*

that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” How might times of “trial” prepare us for living the Christian life and His purposes for our life as believers?

3. **Sometimes He prepares us through times of teaching/training** (Acts 9:1-30 [focus vv.19, 22, 28]) Follow Paul’s dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, God/Jesus through him through a time of preparation, and in Acts 9 you can see that it was through the company of other saints/believers who encouraged, taught and helped to prepare Him for what was ahead. *How might times of “teaching/training” in the company of other perhaps more seasons and mature believers prepare us for living the Christian life and His purposes for our life as believers?*
4. **Sometimes He prepares us through times of thorns** (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) That seems to have been a part of Paul’s story of preparation and keeping him useful in God’s instrument... at least that what he tell us in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, “ 7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” We don’t know exactly what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was but it was given to him to remind him that he needed to be dependent on God and His strength and not his own. “Thorns” like this may sound a bit like a trial of some kind, but I think it is different in some way. Whereas, trails come and go and may be intense for a season; thorn seem to be more permanent (as in Paul’s case) and on-going. They aren’t going away and they are there to keep us focused on the Lord and dependent on Him. I’m thinking more like a disability, or a handicap of some-kind, an acute illness or disease that you just have to learn to live with, blindness, deafness, etc. Remember Paul prayed “three times” for the Lord to take it away, and the Lord essentially said, “Paul this is my training ground for you!” *How might times of “thorns” prepare us for living the Christian life and His purposes for our life as believers?*
5. **Sometimes He prepares us through times of tranquility** [solitude/calmness] (Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12) Throughout Jesus earthly ministry, He frequently and regularly withdrew for time of refreshing, solitude and renewal. In Luke 5:15-16 the Bible tells us, “ 15 However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. 16 So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” These are often times of great preparation and refreshing that make us ready to be used by God. They may represent times spent in prayer and contemplation before God, where He speaks to our heart, reminds us of who we are and how He desires to use us, comforts us, strengthens us, encourages us when we are discouraged. In Luke 6:12 Bible says, “ 12 Now it came to pass in those days that He (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” *How might times of “tranquility/solitude” prepare us for living the Christian life and His purposes for our life as believers?*

EXPERIENCE AT ZAREPHATH (1 Kings 17:8-16)

The name “Zarephath” means “to smelt (as in a smelting pot where metals are melted down), to melt, or to refine.” In the noun form it mean “crucible.” *What is a crucible and what significance might this have for Elijah life at this time? What about for our lives?* At Zarephath there may have been some sort of commercial smelting operation. But God had in mind another kind of refining operation here... and that was to refine His man Elijah.

The Purpose of Trials

In both the Old and New Testaments, we find numerous references to God *refining* His children through fiery trials in much the same way an earthly refiner uses fire to purify gold and silver. The Lord says, *“I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”* (Isaiah 48:10)

God’s Promise in Our Trials

I’ve experienced a few times like this in my life. Some years ago now, I found myself in God’s crucible, and I can tell you first-hand *it hurt*. This particularly painful trial dragged on for many months. In the process, my motives were maligned, my words twisted, and my character questioned. It wasn’t by those who *didn’t* know me but by those I thought *knew me and trusted me!* (They’d called me to be their pastor after all!)

June Hunt says, “If you’re willing to surrender your will to His will, God promises to produce through your trials something far more valuable than gold – *Christlike character*.” I believe that to be true and even Biblical.

How vividly I remember the powerful emotions that churned inside me day and night. Yet there came a point when the Lord, my Refiner, gently reminded me that He stays with us throughout our most painful and unexpected trials. Even when the heat of pain intensifies, our Refiner will stay with us – never leaving us. The Bible says in Malachi 3:3, *“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify ... and refine them like gold and silver.”* And that’s exactly what God intends when He allows trials to enter your life. If you’re willing to surrender your will to His will, God promises to produce through your trials something far more valuable than gold – *Christlike character*.

The Process of Refining

The Bible is filled with word pictures explaining how God operates as a heavenly Refiner in our lives, mirroring the process earthly refiners use to purify ore. This unforgettable imagery is meant to help us understand the purpose behind our times of trial and hardship, even pain – specifically, to conform us to the character of Christ. We don’t develop Christlike character all at once. Character is forged over time, especially through fiery trials. We can gain much insight by understanding the refining process. As Psalm 66:10 says, *“For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver.”*

6 Steps in the Process of Refining Us As Believers:

Step 1: The Brokenness - The refiner in biblical times broke up the hardened ore so that possible precious metals of gold and silver could be exposed to heat. In truth, we are all rough rock in need

of brokenness and God's refining fire. The Lord says in **Jeremiah 23:29** ... *"Is not my word like fire ...and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*

Step 2: The Crucible - The refiner puts the broken, crushed ore into a crucible – a fireproof melting pot able to withstand extreme heat. Then the crucible is placed into the furnace. Our Refiner puts us into a crucible and then into the heated furnace to purify our hearts. The Bible says in **Proverbs 17:3**, *"The refining pot (crucible) is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart."*

Step 3: The Dross - The refiner watches as the ore melts in the crucible and sees a layer of impurities – called dross – form on the surface. Then he removes the dross. For us individually, "dross" represents anything that keeps us from being all that God wants us to be. **Proverbs 25:4** says it, *"Take away the dross from the silver, and it will go to the silversmith for jewelry."*

Step 4: The Heat - The refiner raises the temperature to higher degrees. The heat extracts the dross – the impurities emitted during the refining process. After the refiner painstakingly skims off these impurities, he then increases the heat and places the crucible back into the blistering furnace. Again and again impurities rise to the surface. Again and again, the crucible is returned to the furnace to extract the dross. Why the higher heat? Our Refiner knows the exact temperature needed to extract the dross, and He knows that only certain impurities are released at certain temperatures. Listen to this! The Bible says in **Psalms 12:6**, *"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."*

Step 5: The Purification - Each time, with utmost skill and patience, the refiner continues to remove layer after layer of dross – and the silver and gold become more pure and precious than before. The refiner continues this process until all the impurities are removed. **Isaiah 1:25** says, *"...I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities."*(NIV)

Step 6: The Reflection - To gauge his progress, the refiner looks for his own reflection on the surface of the melted silver or gold in the crucible. The more dross removed, the less distorted his image. Only when the refiner sees a clear reflection of himself in the crucible is the process complete. The Bible tells us that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). As we trust God to use our pain to purify our hearts, our character will come forth as gold. **Job 23:10** says, *"He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold."*(NIV)

Enduring Your Trial with Hope

And that describes our Refiner's loving intentions for allowing us to be in the furnace of trial, hardships and sometimes affliction. But how do you hang on to hope in the midst of your intense trials? As we trust God to use our pain and struggle to purify our hearts, our character will come forth as gold.

Keys for Persevering in the Crucible/Furnace:

- (1) You persevere by pressing close to the heart of the One who allowed the trial
- (2) You persevere by trust in His perfect plan for your life
- (3) You persevere by humbly yielding your will to His will

And when you do, you will experience the timeless truth of God's Word, in Isaiah 43:2, "*When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*"

In my own life, the facts are clear: Time and again, God – through His matchless mercy and grace – has transformed my *tests* into a *testimony*. He did it for Elijah and used him in a mighty way. And He will do the same for you. I know! If God can do that for me – He can do it for you!

Let's look at it in Elijah's life at Zarephath. Notice our passage again in verses 8-16...

3 Parts to God's Refining of Elijah at Zarephath:

1. **God's command (vv.8-9)** – ⁸*Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,* ⁹*"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."* Elijah was not forgotten as Cherith. God spoke to him there, and what a comfort that must have been. He knew he wasn't alone. Also, God knew where the prophet was headed next, indicated by the words "arise"... "go"... "dwell" He was to go to Zarephath, located 75 miles to 100 miles across the territory from Cherith. The trip could have been humanly threatening, since he was being hunted by King Ahab (see 1 Kings 18:10). A humbling element of the command was that Elijah was told to anticipate being provided for by a impoverished woman hand-selected by God. ***How might the two verses indicate how God was working on refining and preparing Elijah? (arise, go, dwell, widow)***

Worth observing: *Sometimes the most humbling tasks prepare us for higher tasks. First God used ravens to provide for Elijah, now it was a poor improvised woman.*

2. **Elijah's obedience (vv.10-14)** – ¹⁰*So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink."* ¹¹*And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."* ¹²*So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a ¹²jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."* ¹³*And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son."* ¹⁴*For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.'* Two tests faced him at this new location chosen for him by God.

2 Tests Elijah Faced at Zarephath:

- (1) **The test of first impressions (v.10)** – Upon arriving at Zarephath he observed a penniless woman scratching around for sticks to fuel a fire over which she could cook. The first sight was not an encouraging nor hopeful one for Elijah... Elijah must of thought "Really, God this is who you have sent me to too take care of me and provide for men and protect me!" First impression for what it is worth. The first sight of her had to be discouraging, bleak and disheartening. Elijah could have run, but he did not. That's important to note!
- (2) **The test of physical impossibilities (vv.11-14)** – The thirsty prophet asked the woman for a small jar of water. Leaving to fulfill his desire, she heard him call out an additional request

for a piece of bread. She informed him in verse 12, ¹² *So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."* He replied in verses 13-14, ¹³ *And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son."* ¹⁴ *For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.'* Huh! No rain, yet they would have seed/wheat/grain for bread and oil... miraculous. Every meal (morning and evening) was a miracle; they had what they needed.

3. **God's faithfulness (vv.15-16) -** ¹⁵ *So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days.* ¹⁶ *The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.* Though the test is short, the most exciting part of this segment of the story really appears here. God's faithfulness was underscored by two ongoing miracles.

2 Miracles of God's Faithfulness:

- (1) **The flour was never exhausted**
- (2) **The oil never ran out**

FOUR LINGERING LESSONS

One tendency is to breeze through a short passage like this and fail to see it's relevance to our own lives and apply it to where we are. However, there's something of value for us to import into our own experience and walk with God...something that comes in the form of four reminders.

4 Important Reminders from Zarephath for Believers Today:

- (1) **God's leading is often surprising... *don't analyze it***
- (2) **Beginning days are often the hardest... *don't quit***
- (3) **God's promises often hinge upon obedience... *don't ignore your part***
- (4) **God's provisions are often just enough... *don't fail to thank Him***