

1  **Three Ways to Think About Suffering**

1 Kings 17

2  **Name this man**

1


- 2
- Most evil king of the northern kingdom of Israel to-date.
 - Married an evil Phoenician princess.
 - Together with her, introduced the worship of false gods into Israel.
 -

3  **Name this woman**


- King Ahab's wife.
- Princess of what pagan nation?
- In Hebrew, her name means "There is no _____"
-

4  **Name this idol**


- Second member of the unholy Phoenician trinity.
- God of fertility, lightning, and weather.
- Also associated with child sacrifice, another one of his names is _____.

5  **Name this man**


- Name means "Jehovah is the Strong One."
- One of the most colorful figures in the Bible, this man is the most important of the Old Testament prophets to the Jewish people.

6  **Places and people**


- 1
- Elijah went to Ahab and told him "*As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be ____ nor ____ these years, but according to my word.*"
 -
- 2
- This ____ was significant because it symbolized Israel's own spiritual ____.
 - This judgment is significant because it is for an undetermined length of time.

7  **Places and people**


- Afterwards, God sends Elijah to the brook _____.
- There he is to be fed by _____.

8  **Fed by ravens**


- 1
- Ravens are unclean animals.
 - They are carrion birds, and though highly intelligent are not especially attractive.
 - They feed on dead things, refuse, and trash.
 -
- 2
- By feeding His prophet – and not just any prophet; this is Elijah – in this manner, God reminds us all that we are nothing special.
 - Glorifying us or gratifying our egos is not God's ultimate goal – in fact sometimes it can be the exact opposite.

9  **Places and people**

- God then sends Elijah to stay with a widow woman at _____.
- This is significant for a couple of reasons:
 - Widows in this culture were generally the dregs of society – not someone with resources to "sustain" others.
 - There were plenty of needy widows in Israel, yet God sends Elijah to a pagan woman in a pagan land.

10  **Places and people**

- The widow has nothing. When Elijah meets her she is about to bake one last _____ so that she and her son can eat it and _____.
- Elijah promises that if she will trust God, He will not fail her, and they will have food to spare for the duration of the famine.

11  **The miracle**

- The widow believes Elijah and God rewards her faith by giving her an unending supply of _____ and _____ throughout the duration of the famine.

12 **The Author speaks**

- Here is what Christ Himself had to say about the significance of this:
- Luke 4:25 – *“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;*
- *But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.*
- *And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”*

13 **The Author speaks**

- So the true focus of the miracle here is not that God extended the oil and flour.
- It was that God extends His grace and works great things in the lives of people who are undeserving and even unlikely.
- In the same way, if we only focus on the good things that God is doing for us, we miss the point.

14 **Three ways to think about suffering**

15 **1 Kings 17:17-19**

- *“And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.*
- *And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?*
- *And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.”*

16 **Not Superwoman**

- Despite the faith this woman has already displayed, PLUS the miraculous daily provision of food, when her son dies she immediately blames God and Elijah.
- Note that her first response is not to pray to God directly. This shows us the first of three important ways that we should think about suffering – both in our own lives, and in the lives of others.

17 **1. Suffering shows us where our trust is**

- The widow’s first problem is that she put Elijah up on a pedestal. She blames him first and foremost (“what have I to do with thee?”) for her problems.
- It is all too easy for us to put someone up on a pedestal who has a past history of helping us out or solving our problems, and expect perfection from them.

18 **1. Suffering shows us where our trust is**










- Even though God was providing for her needs daily, the widow was focusing more on the human messenger than the divine giver of the message.
- We should never elevate anyone other than God to such a level – to do so is the very essence of idolatry.
 - Idolatry is expecting someone or something else to fill a role only God can meet.

19 **2. Suffering prompts self-examination**

- The second individual that the widow blames is herself:
- *“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?”*

20 **2. Suffering prompts self-examination**

- The whole Canaanite religion was completely obsessed with and centered around immorality.
- The widow is essentially asking Elijah if God is punishing her because of sins she committed

- in her past.
- In this case, the widow's past sins do not seem to have anything to do with her son's death (there is no indication of this in Scripture).
- 21  **2. Suffering prompts self-examination**
- Very often we need the sense of sense of urgency prompted by suffering to truly confess and forsake hidden sins.
 - Samson is a good example of this: he never truly dealt with his lust problem, so God eventually dealt with it for him.
 - The caution here is not to repeat Samson's mistake.
- 22  **2. Suffering prompts self-examination**
- The widow's concern for her past sins is valid, but it is not the only reason for her suffering.
 - Not all sickness and death is because God is punishing someone. According to Jesus, some pain and suffering come strictly for the "glory of God."
- 23  **2. Suffering prompts self-examination**
- *All punishment is providential, however not all providence is punishment.*
 - So not every bad thing that happens to us is punishment for past sins, however often God will use suffering as a prompt for self-examination.
- 24  **3. Suffering enables credibility**
- Verses 19-22: *"And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.*
 - *And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?*
 - *And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.*
 - *And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived."*
- 25  **3. Suffering enables credibility**
- Notice that Elijah does not enter into any deep theological discussions about why a loving God would let this happen.
 - He avoids the widow's attempts to start an argument or a discussion and instead turns to prayer.
 - Often our first inclination when faced with painful Providence is to take our problems to other finite individuals.
- 26  **Elijah's appeal**
- *"And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?*
 - *And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again."*
- 27  **3. Suffering enables credibility**
- Elijah questions God without being irreverent.
 - It is not wrong of us to ask *why* we are facing the troubles we are in. This is merely seeking to know God's purposes – an attitude which is actually encouraged in Scripture.
 - Ultimately, though, Elijah leaves the final outcome in God's hands.
- 28  **The boy revived**
- Verses 22-24: *"And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.*
 - *And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.*
 - *And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth."*
- 29  **God glorified, credibility created**
- The end result of all of this was that God was glorified, and that his messenger was verified

in a real and material way.

- Often it is not until we meet the needs of the world in a practical way that we will have any credibility as a messenger.

30  **Suffering & credibility**

- Suffering can enable credibility in two ways:
 - Our own suffering gives us the credentials to speak meaningfully into the suffering of others.
 - The suffering of others creates opportunities to become a credible messenger and meet real needs.

31  **Taking it home**

- This story is yet another reminder in the story of Elijah that faith in God does not necessarily preclude hardships.
- This is the antithesis of many “faith healing” movements.
- As we will see in the weeks to come, this was an important concept for Elijah to be able to grasp.