

1 Kings 17:17-24

Why did the boy die?

Women's sin?

Sin is not always the immediate cause of suffering (**John 9:3; Heb. 12:7-11**)

Have I ever prayed this way?

In communion

cried ... heard: The scriptural motif of crying and being heard or calling and being answered, is a theme that emphasizes intimacy of fellowship or communion (Pss. 22:24; 91:15; 102:1, 2).

Cried out

Over time

Again

Again

What was the result?

What does my faith say of me

by word:

by deed:

Does it say what I want it to say...

What is it with the three?

Elijah's action in the stretching out of himself on the dead lad **three times** may symbolize the power of the thrice holy God (Num. 6:24-26; Is. 6:3). Elisha later would perform a similar act (2 Kin. 4:34; Acts 20:10).

Prophetic

The entire incident demonstrates that the Lord is the God of Israelite and Gentile alike

(Acts 10:34-35; 11:18; Rom. 3:29),

and that He is the author of life itself (Luke 20:38; John 11:25, 26).

~~17:18 Sin is not always the immediate cause of suffering (**John 9:3; Heb. 12:7-11**).~~

~~17:19, 20~~ Elijah stayed in an **upper room**, temporary quarters on the roof accessible from outside the house. This arrangement that preserved the privacy of all parties and protected the widow's reputation in the community.

~~17:21~~ Elijah's action in the stretching out of himself on the dead lad **three times** may symbolize the power of the thrice holy God (Num. 6:24-26; Is. 6:3). Elisha later would perform a similar act (2 Kin. 4:34; Acts 20:10).

17:21, 22 cried ... heard: The scriptural motif of crying and being heard or calling and being answered, is a theme that emphasizes intimacy of fellowship or communion (Pss. 22:24; 91:15; 102:1, 2).

17:23, 24 now ... I know: The widow's belief had now grown into fullness of faith. That Elijah was indeed a "man of God" (v. 18) had been proved by word and deed. **The entire incident demonstrates that the Lord is the God of Israelite and Gentile alike** (Acts 10:34–35; 11:18; Rom. 3:29), **and that He is the author of life itself** (Luke 20:38; John 11:25, 26).⁺

Verses 17–24

We have here a further recompense made to the widow for her kindness to the prophet; as if it were a small thing to be kept alive, her son, when dead, is restored to life, and so restored to her. Observe,

I. The sickness and death of the child. For aught that appears he was her only son, the comfort of her widowed estate. He was fed miraculously, and yet that did not secure him from sickness and death. *Your fathers did eat manna, and are dead, but there is bread of which a man may eat and not die*, which was given for the life of the world, Jn. 6:49, 50. The affliction was to this widow as a thorn in the flesh, lest she should be lifted up above measure with the favours that were done her and the honours that were put upon her. 1. She was nurse to a great prophet, was employed to sustain him, and had strong reason to think the Lord would do her good; yet now she loses her child. Note, We must not think it strange if we meet with very sharp afflictions, even when we are in the way of duty, and of eminent service to God. 2. She was herself nursed by miracle, and kept a good house without charge or care, by a distinguishing blessing from heaven; and in the midst of all this satisfaction she was thus afflicted. Note, When we have the clearest manifestations of God's favour and good-will towards us, even then we must prepare for the rebukes of Providence. Our mountain never stands so strong but it may be moved, and therefore, in this world, we must always rejoice with trembling.

II. Her pathetic complaint to the prophet of this affliction. It should seem, the child died suddenly, else she would have applied to Elijah, while he was sick, for the cure of him; but being dead, dead in her bosom, she expostulates with the prophet upon it, rather to give vent to her sorrow than in any hope of relief, v. 18. 1. She expresses herself passionately: *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?* How calmly had she spoken of her own and her child's death when she expected to die for want (v. 12)—*that we may eat, and die!* Yet now that her child dies, and not so miserably as by famine, she is extremely disturbed at it. We may speak lightly of an affliction at a distance, but when it *toucheth us we are troubled*, Job 4:5. Then she spoke deliberately, now in haste; the death of her child was now a surprise to her, and it is hard to keep our spirits composed when troubles come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, and in the midst of our peace and prosperity. She calls him *a man of God*, and yet quarrels with him as if he had occasioned the death of her child, and is ready to which she had never seen him, forgetting past mercies and miracles: "What have I done against thee?" (so some understand it), "Wherein have I offended thee, or been wanting in my duty? *Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.*" 2. Yet she expresses herself

¹ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). [Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary](#) (p. 453). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

penitently: “*Hast thou come to call my sin to thy remembrance*, as the cause of the affliction, and so to call it to *my* remembrance, as the effect of the affliction?” Perhaps she knew of Elijah’s intercession against Israel, and, being conscious to herself of sin, perhaps her former worshipping of Baal the god of the Sidonians, she apprehends he had made intercession against her. Note, (1.) When God removes our comforts from use he remembers our sins against us, perhaps the iniquities of our youth, though long since past, Job 13:26. Our sins are the death of our children. (2.) When God thus remembers our sins against us he designs thereby to make us remember them against ourselves and repent of them.

III. The prophet’s address to God upon this occasion. He gave no answer to her expostulation, but brought it to God, and laid the case before him, not knowing what to say to it himself. He took the dead child from the mother’s bosom to his own bed, v. 19. Probably he had taken a particular kindness to the child, and found the affliction his own more than by sympathy. He retired to his chamber, and, 1. He humbly reasons with God concerning the death of the child, v. 20. He sees death striking by commission from God: *Thou hast brought this evil* for is there any evil of this kind in the city, in the family, and the Lord has not done it? He pleads the greatness of the affliction to the poor mother: “It is *evil upon the widow*; thou art the widow’s God, and dost not usually bring evil upon widows; it is affliction added to the afflicted.” He pleads his own concern: “It is the widow *with whom I sojourn*; wilt thou, that art my God, bring evil upon one of the best of my benefactors? I shall be reflected upon, and others will be afraid of entertaining me, if I bring death into the house where I come.” 2. He earnestly begs of God to restore the child to life again, v. 21. We do not read before this of any that were raised to life; yet Elijah, by a divine impulse, prays for the resurrection of this child, which yet will not warrant us to do the like. David expected not, by fasting and prayer, to bring his child back to life (2 Sa. 12:23), but Elijah had a power to work miracles, which David had not. He *stretched himself upon the child*, to affect himself with the case and to show how much he was affected with it and how desirous he was of the restoration of the child—he would if he could put life into him by his own breath and warmth; also to give a sign of what God would do by his power, and what he does by his grace, in raising dead souls to a spiritual life; the Holy Ghost comes upon them, overshadows them, and puts life into them. He is very particular in his prayer: *I pray thee let this child’s soul come into him again*, which plainly supposes the existence of the soul in a state of separation from the body, and consequently its immortality, which Grotius thinks God designed by this miracle to give intimation and evidence of, for the encouragement of his suffering people.

IV. The resurrection of the child, and the great satisfaction it gave to the mother: the child revived, v. 22. See the power of prayer and the power of him that hears prayer, who *kills and makes alive*. Elijah brought him to his mother, who, we may suppose, could scarcely believe her own eyes, and therefore Elijah assures her it is her own: “It is *thy son that liveth*; see it is thy own, and not another,” v. 23. The good woman hereupon cries out, *Now I know that thou art a man of God*; though she knew it before, by the increase of her meal, yet the death of her child she took so unkindly that she began to question it (a good man surely would not serve her so); but now she was abundantly satisfied that he had both the power and goodness of a man of God, and will never doubt of it again, but give up herself to the direction of his word and the worship of the God of Israel. Thus the death of the child (like that of Lazarus, Jn. 11:4) was for the glory of God and the honour of his prophet.²

² Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 508). Peabody: Hendrickson.

ELIJAH RESTORES THE WIDOW'S SON *1 Kings 17:17–24*

While Elijah was staying with the widow, her son died. The widow confronted the prophet, who took him to the upper room where he was lodging and prayed for his restoration. The Lord answered Elijah's prayer, and the prophet took the living boy downstairs and presented him to his mother.

The widow's bitter words (1 Kings 17:17, 18). We can understand the widow's anguish. Had God preserved her family from the drought, only to take her son? Was God the kind of person who gives with one hand while taking away with the other?

But the widow also blamed herself as well as God. This is shown in her words, "Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" The word "remember" has a distinct connotation in the Hebrew language. She implied that Elijah's presence drew God's attention to her as a sinner and that he remembered her sins and acted appropriately in taking her son.

People who do not know the Lord sometimes assume their tragedies are divine punishment. But the widow was about to learn that her tragedy would become an occasion for God to display his power and grace.

Elijah's prayer (17:19–21). Elijah questioned God's permitting the boy to die. But he also prayed that the child's life would be restored. His prayer was answered and the child revived.

"Have You also brought tragedy?" Like the widow, Elijah struggled to understand the boy's death. Why would God do this? Did he intend to "bring tragedy"?

Elijah's reaction differed from that of the woman. She immediately concluded God was punishing her. But Elijah asked God about his intention. Did the Lord intend to bring tragedy, or was this event to be understood differently? In fact, the "tragedy" would soon become a cause for rejoicing, demonstrating that the widow needed to trust completely in the Lord and his spokesman (compare 1 Kings 17:24).

How often what we interpret as tragedy is intended by God as a blessing. How wise to adopt Elijah's stance—and look for the blessing that is hidden in the pain.

"He stretched himself out on the child three times." Elijah was truly a "man of God." An Israelite who touched a dead body was made unclean (Num. 19:11). Yet Elijah, out of his deep concern for the widow and her son, not only touched the child; he stretched out on his body. This was a symbolic act—an acted out way of praying, "Let this lifeless body be as my living body."

"Let this child's soul come back to him." The prayer, literally, was "let this child's life [*nephesh*] return."

Some people have called this miracle a “resurrection.” It was not. History’s only resurrection was that of Jesus. Raised, Jesus lives forever—his body transformed. The miracle described here, like the raising of Lazarus, was a resuscitation—a return to mortal life. The boy whose life was restored grew old and died again, just as Lazarus did. The restoration of mortal life is a miracle—but far less a miracle than the transformation we will experience in our resurrection when Jesus comes again.

God answered Elijah’s prayer (17:22–23). The Lord answered Elijah’s prayer and restored the child. Elijah brought the boy downstairs and presented him to his mother: “See, your son lives” (1 Kings 17:24).

The meaning of the miracle (17:24). The woman summed up the meaning of the miracle: “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth.”

“You are a man of God.” The miracle authenticated Elijah as God’s spokesman. But the miracle did more. It also revealed Elijah as a caring, godly man. We need to keep this in mind as we read later accounts of what seem to be harsh acts of the prophet.

“The word of the LORD in your mouth.” The miracle also authenticated the God whose word Elijah spoke. If there had been any doubt in her mind that the Lord is the living God, that doubt was erased. By giving life, Yahweh was revealed as living himself. There could be no doubt of his reality.

“The word of the LORD is truth.” Truth as understood in the Bible has an unbreakable link to reality. What is true corresponds with what is real. What is false is unreal, and thus unreliable. The woman realized that the ultimate reality in our universe is God.³

In how many ways did the Lord’s words through Elijah challenge the faith of the widow from Zarephath? (1 Kin. 17:13–16)

KINGDOM EXTRA

This episode teaches us to invite God to work by His unlimited power within our limited circumstances and resources. Two important principles for our giving are illustrated by this passage of Scripture. First, we must give something out of our need. That is the kind of giving that involves our faith. Second, we must give first as a way of activating the miracle supply of God.

³ Richards, L. (1998). [*Every miracle in the Bible*](#) (pp. 114–115). Nashville: T. Nelson.

Your giving causes something to happen according to God's eternal principles of seedtime and harvest. There is an old saying: "Without God, you cannot; without you, God will not." God has already given from His side. Now we must step out in our giving to Him.

How did the widow from Zarephath interpret the death of her only son? (1 Kin. 17:17, 18)

How did Elijah go about interceding for the dead son of the widow who had cared for him during the drought and famine? (1 Kin. 17:19–21)

Parallel the stages of the restoration of physical life to the son to the restoration of spiritual hope to his mother. (1 Kin. 17:22–24)

KINGDOM EXTRA

Often we do not understand the reason for sickness. The widow of Zarephath questioned Elijah's responsibility (1 Kin. 17:18); Elijah questioned God's reasonableness (v. 18); then lying prostrate on the child, he cried out in intercession to the Lord (v. 21)—and resurrection was the result. Healing comes as we move from reasoning over questions of *why* and begin responding to *how* the Lord works through faith-filled prayer. The Lord desires to heal.

What could have happened for King Ahab if he had responded to the drought in the same way the widow responded to the death of her son?

FAITH ALIVE

How have you seen God withhold His blessing from you or from another in order to make His displeasure with sin obvious?

How have you seen God bestow His blessing on you or on another in order to express His good pleasure with growing faith?⁴

17:17–24 Elijah’s reviving of the widow’s son demonstrates the effectiveness of his petition and his ability to mediate divine power. It sets the stage for the more dramatic, large-scale events that follow (18:20–46).

Miracles of the Prophets Table

17:17 no breath The Hebrew word used here, *neshamah*, describes the force that animates all living creatures (Gen 2:7; Deut 20:16; Josh 11:11, 14). Its loss marks the end of life (Job 34:14–15).

17:18 O man of God This title designates a prophet or messenger of God. It also is used in reference to Moses (Deut 33:1).

17:19 upper room where he was staying A Shunammite shows this same hospitality to Elisha (2 Kgs 4:10–11).

17:21 three times A common number in rituals.

the life of The Hebrew word used here, *nephesh*, is typically translated “soul,” but can also refer to “breath,” “life,” or “inner being.” See note on 1 Kgs 2:4.

17:22 he lived The Hebrew word *chayah* simply means “to live,” but is sometimes translated as “he revived.” The child is never referred to using the Hebrew word *mwtmwt*, meaning “dead.”

17:24 Now this I know, that The revival of the widow’s son elicits an affirmation of Elijah’s prophetic office, a response not present with the miracle of the flour and oil (v. 16).⁵

1 Kings 17:17

¹⁷Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him.

Luke 7:12

¹²And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was

⁴ Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1998). *Receiving or Refusing God’s Glory: A study of 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Ki 17:17–24). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.

1 Kings 17:17–24

¹⁷Now it happened after these things *that* the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him.

¹⁸So she said to Elijah, “What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?”¹⁹And he said to her, “Give me your son.” So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed.

²⁰Then he cried out to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?”²¹And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.”²²Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.²³And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives!”²⁴Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now by this I know that you *are* a man of God, *and* that the word of the LORD in your mouth *is* the truth.”

1 Kings 17:18

¹⁸So she said to Elijah, “What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?”

Matthew 8:29

²⁹And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

Mark 5:7

⁷And he cried out with a loud voice and said, “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.”

1 Kings 17:21

²¹And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and

Matthew 10:41

⁴¹He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.

Acts 20:10

said, “O LORD my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.”

¹⁰But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.”

1 Kings 17:23

²³And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives!”

Luke 7:15

¹⁵So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.⁶

⁶ Jones, D. A. (2009). [*Old Testament Quotations and Allusions in the New Testament*](#) (1 Ki 17:17–Lk 7:15). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.