Active Faith
1 Kings 17:8-16
SS Lesson for 10/13/2019

Devotional Scripture: Prov 3:1-10

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE
Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Key Verse: 1 Kings 17:16
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

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- Believe because it is the truth and it will bear fruit (Col 1:5-6)
- Believe because it comes with the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:5)
- Believe because it gives birth as one of the firstfruits of God’s creations (James 1:18)
- Believe because it is living and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)

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- Obey God’s commands by living a life that proves obedience (2 Cor 9:13)
- Obey God’s commands so that we will know God (1 John 2:3)
- Obey God’s commands by living in God (1 John 3:24)
- Obey God’s commands by being ready to do whatever is good (Titus 3:1)

Faith to ask for his needs (11)
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- Ask for needs seeking the help of God (Luke 7:2-5)
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- Eternal provision because His presence is eternal (Ps 21:6)
- Eternal provision because His kingdom is eternal (Dan 4:3)
- Eternal provision because of His unfailing love (Isa 54:10)
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CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM J. HAMPTON KEATHLEY
Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Ralph Waldo Emerson famously said that “the reward of a thing well done is having done it.” Emerson, it should be noted, did not work in a human resources office. Today’s hiring managers know that relying on intrinsic motivators—like the satisfaction of doing a good job—is not often successful for recruiting and retaining talent. Fortune 500 companies were studied to discover how they incentivized their employees in ways other than increasing salaries. The lengths that these large companies went to in order to reward their best employees are mind-boggling. Google, the internet giant, offered free food and outdoor workout facilities to employees. The Mayo Clinic offered free massages and mental health services to employees at its Arizona site. Aflac hosted an annual employee appreciation week complete with trips to theme parks, movie screenings, and prize drawings. Most employers can’t bankroll such ambitious employee incentive programs. However, smaller employers also see the value of incentives and offer extra time off, gift cards, etc. God offers incentives for obedience to Him (see Leviticus 26:3-12; Psalm 19:7-11; etc.), but His motivation isn’t to jockey with other deities for the loyalty of a committed work base. Instead, God’s rewards flow from His just character (Romans 2:6; Hebrews 11:6). God’s justice not only punishes the wicked but rewards those who faithfully obey Him (Revelation 22:11, 12), especially when they do so in the face of adversity.

Most scholars believe that the books of 1 and 2 Kings, originally a single book, were written after the fall of both halves of the divided kingdom of Israel but before Judah returned from Babylonian exile in about 539 BC. The author of these books, whom some believe to be Jeremiah or one of his contemporaries, drew on hundreds of years of historical sources. He viewed Israel’s history through the lens of God’s covenant with His people as described in Deuteronomy. The author of 1 and 2 Kings meticulously organized Israel’s history to make it obvious to his fellow Israelites that they were suffering exile and humiliation because of their lack of faithfulness to God’s covenant. Throughout the books of 1 and 2 Kings, the Lord honored the faith of individuals—whether kings, prophets, or the lowly—who remained true to the God of Israel. The exiles who first read 1 and 2 Kings struggled to understand why God allowed them to be handed over to their enemies and how they might find forgiveness and restoration. The history served in part to assure them that God would honor their faith, no matter where the people found themselves. Our narrative is set in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab (874-853 BC). The details of his reign reveal the king’s unwillingness to trust God to reward the northern kingdom if they would remain faithful to the terms of the Mosaic covenant (1 Kings 16:30-33). God initiated a covenant with His people that was similar to political treaties that earthly kings entered into with a newly conquered population (see Lesson 6). As king, Ahab had been charged with the task of being a steward of the covenant, just like every king before him (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The blessings and curses of the covenant should have provided every incentive needed for Ahab to lead his people into a season of covenant renewal. However, his contempt for the covenant and the Lord could not have been clearer. Ahab placed no stock in God’s sovereignty or in His ability to reward the faithful or judge the wicked.

Key Verse: 1 Kings 17:16

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

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

17:1. Elijah had been and was being prepared by the Lord to demonstrate to all Israel that Yahweh, not Baal, is still the only true God. Even Elijah’s name, which means “Yahweh is my God,” conveyed that fact! Elijah lived in Gilead east of the Jordan River near a community called Tishbe. Perhaps as Elijah heard reports of Jezebel’s increasing maneuverings to replace the worship of the Lord with Baal worship his godly heart was stirred up. God gave him a mission. Armed with God’s promise he walked westward to Samaria. Bursting into the palace, he hurled his ultimatum at King Ahab. He claimed that the Lord is the God of Israel, that He is alive (cf. v. 12; 18:10), and that he, Elijah, was God’s servant. (On the words “As
the LORD... lives” see comments on 1:29.) Elijah could confidently declare that there would be neither dew nor rain because God had promised to withhold these from the land if His people turned from Him to other gods (Lev. 26:18-19; Deut. 11:16-17; 28:23-24). God had apparently revealed to Elijah that He would honor that promise in Elijah’s day. This would have struck at the heart of Baalism, for Baal-worshippers believed that their god was the god of rain! The drought, brought on by the true God, showed that He, not Baal, controls the weather. This was a remarkable demonstration of God’s superiority and of the total inadequacy and falsehood of Baal worship.

17:2-4. Having made his dramatic announcement, Elijah was told by the LORD to leave Samaria, return eastward, and hide in a ravine by the wadi Kerith, east of the Jordan River. Elijah had to hide because he would soon be hunted by the king (cf. 18:10). The exact location of this seasonal brook is not known; it was one of many streams that flowed during the rainy season but dried up when the weather turned hot. God promised to provide food and drink for His servant at this unlikely spot.

17:5-6. Elijah obeyed the LORD, who miraculously provided for him as He had promised. God directed ravens, birds that normally neglect their own young (cf. Job 38:41), to bring bread and meat faithfully to Elijah every morning and evening. And he drank water from the brook. The Hebrew word for “bread” (leḥem) means food in general, possibly including berries, fruit, nuts, eggs, etc. Perhaps they were brought from a distance where the drought had not yet affected the vegetation. Through this unusual manner of nourishing His prophet physically, God was also nourishing Elijah’s faith for later feats of spiritual strength (see the list “God’s Miracles through Elijah and Elisha,” near 2 Kings 2:13-14).

17:7. How long Elijah stayed at the brook is not revealed. Some time later it dried up because of the drought which lasted three and one-half years in all (Luke 4:25; James 5:17). Elijah had learned that God would miraculously provide for him, but now he would learn that God could do the same for others—even Gentiles—as well. God was preparing His servant for a great showdown on Mount Carmel.

17:8-11. Elijah was directed to Zarephath, a town on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, the homeland of Jezebel (cf. 16:31) and the heart of Baal-Melqart territory (see the map “Elijah’s Travels”). Zarephath was 80-90 miles from Kerith. God told Elijah that a widow would feed him (cf. Luke 4:25-26). Widows were usually poor people; normally they ran out of food first in a famine. This famine had been created by the drought. Therefore going to a widow for food was a strange directive. God was again using an unusual source to feed His prophet. Obediently Elijah made his way to Zarephath. When he entered the town he tested the first widow he saw by asking her for a drink. Her favorable response led him to request a piece of bread.

17:12-16. The widow recognized Elijah as an Israelite and appealed to Yahweh in affirming that she had no bread; she had only a little flour and oil, enough for a last meal for her son and herself. Here was a Gentile woman in Phoenicia who believed in the Lord; she said she believed He is alive (As surely as the Lord your God lives; cf. v. 1; 18:10). Elijah calmed her fears of himself, her hunger, and her imminent death. He asked her to feed him first... and then use what was left to feed herself and her son. Then he gave her a promise on the authority of the word of God: she would have food until the drought ended. Her obedient response demonstrated her faith in the word of the LORD. The Lord honored her faith by fulfilling His promise miraculously. This miracle of God’s continually supplying flour and olive oil was another polemic (protest) against Baal, just as was the drought. Baal-worshippers believed he was a fertility god, giving rain to make crops grow. But he could not overcome the drought to make wheat and olive trees grow. Only the true God could provide flour and oil in a drought!

17:17-18. Sometime later (cf. v. 7)—again the exact time is not given—tragedy befell Elijah’s hostess. The woman who owned the house was the widow. Her young son fell ill and finally stopped breathing. Some Bible critics say the boy was only unconscious, not dead, and that his restoration was therefore not a miracle. However, verses 18, 20, 22-23 make it clear that he had actually died. The woman had a guilty conscience and immediately concluded that God was punishing her for her sin by killing her son. This is a common reaction among many people who do not know God’s ways well when personal tragedy enters their lives (cf. John 9:2-3). What sin she was referring to is not stated.

17:19-21. The boy was small enough to be carried in his mother’s arms. Many homes in Palestine at that time had guest rooms built on their roofs. It was in one such upper room that Elijah was staying. Elijah’s first prayer (v. 20) simply expressed his compassion for the woman who, in addition to the trials of the famine, now also had to bear this tragedy. Implicit in the prayer was the desire that God relieve her of this added burden. Often in cases of miraculous restoration and healing, God’s servant placed his hand on the
afflicted one to indicate that the power of God in him was passing to the needy individual (e.g., Matt. 8:3). In this instance Elijah out of heartfelt concern stretched himself out placing the whole body of the lad in contact with his own. Three times Elijah did this, praying each time that God would restore the boy’s life. Persistence in prayer is a fundamental requisite for obtaining one’s petitions (cf. Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:5-13). It proved effective in this case.

17:22-24. God miraculously restored the boy’s life. This is the first recorded instance in Scripture of restoration to life of one who had died. Elijah carried the lad downstairs (the boy was apparently weak) and presented him to his mother. This miracle proved to the woman that Elijah was indeed a man of God and that the word of the Lord that Elijah claimed to speak was indeed the truth. This incident showed the widow and others that the power of the Lord as the true God contrasted greatly with the impotency of Baal.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Prophet’s Faith (1 Kings 17:8-11)

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."
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."

Faith to believe God’s command (8-9)

Believe because it is the actual word of God (1 Thess 2:13)
13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Believe because it is the truth and it will bear fruit (Col 1:5-6)
5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel
6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.

Believe because it comes with the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:5)
5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

Believe because it gives birth as one of the firstfruits of God’s creations (James 1:18)
18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Believe because it is living and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)
23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.
Faith to obey God’s command (10)

*Obey God's commands by being a slave to righteousness (Rom 6:15-18)*

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

*Obey God's commands by living a life that proves obedience (2 Cor 9:13)*

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

*Obey God's commands so that we will know God (1 John 2:3)*

3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

*Obey God's commands by living in God (1 John 3:24)*

24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

*Obey God's commands by being ready to do whatever is good (Titus 3:1)*

1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,

Faith to ask for his needs (11)

*Ask for needs seeking the compassion of God (Mark 9:21-24)*

21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

*Ask for needs seeking the help of God (Luke 7:2-5)*

2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

*Ask for needs trusting in the power of God (Luke 5:12-13)*

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

*Ask for needs through faith (Luke 13:23-25)*

23 Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'
The Widow's Faith (1 Kings 17:12-14)

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."
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.'"

Faith to give sacrificially (12)

Sacrificial giving done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)
12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Sacrificial giving offered the right way (Gen 4:2-7)
2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Sacrificial giving out of love (Eph 5:1-2)
1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Sacrificial giving to help others (Phil 4:16-18)
16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Sacrificial giving through steadfast faith (2 Tim 4:6-8)
6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Faith to believe in God's provision (12-13)

Provisions through the glorious riches of Jesus (Phil 4:19)
19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Provisions through the Word of God (Deut 8:3)
3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Provisions that will abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:8)
8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.
Provisions through the fear of God (Ps 34:9)
9 Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

Provisions through being made rich in every way (2 Cor 9:10-11)
10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

God’s Faithfulness (1 Kings 17:15-16)
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.

Faithful to fulfill His promises (15)

God is faithful to His promises and does not violate His covenants (Ps 89:33-36)
33 but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. 34 I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. 35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David — 36 that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun;

God is faithful to His promises and remembers His covenants (Ps 106:43-45)
43 Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. 44 But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; 45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.

God is faithful to His promises of redemption (Ps 111:9)
9 He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever — holy and awesome is his name.

God is faithful to His promises of upholding His people (Isa 42:6)
6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

God is faithful to His promises through Jesus’ blood covenant (Matt 26:28)
28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Faithful to provide eternally (16)

Eternal provision through the covenant with God's people (Jer 32:37-41)
37 I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. 38 They will be my people, and I will be their God. 39 I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. 40 I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. 41 I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

Eternal provision because His presence is eternal (Ps 21:6)
6 Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.

Eternal provision because His kingdom is eternal (Dan 4:3)
3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.
Eternal provision because of His unfailing love (Isa 54:10)

10 Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Eternal provision because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2)

2 a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,
1 Kings 17:9 Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.

This verse has three commands, “arise,” “go,” and “stay.” There is also a promise of provision. In each of these there are tests for the prophet. There are tests of faith or trust, of obedience, of availability and commitment, a test of vision for what God was doing in his life, and a test of contentment.

(1) The First Command--“Arise.” Of course, before we can move on in the will of God, we must arise, not just physically but spiritually. Following the Lord in obedience is the outcome of spiritual life and spiritual awakening. (Cf. Ephesians 5:8f.)

(2) The Second Command--(the natural outcome): “go to Zarephath.” “Go” is a Hebrew word halak which means “to go, walk.” In this case, it carries the idea of traveling or journeying, which included hardships and danger. I don’t want to make too much of this, but spiritually speaking, to arise is to go. It means to wake up from our apathy and sluggishness and get involved in God’s will for our lives. Too often Christians simply sit and soak. Because they are not using what they know in faith, they also eventually begin to sulk, and sour. Rather, God wants us to sit and soak up the Word, but then, by faith to strive for Him in the power of Christ (cf. Col. 1:29). This means our availability to go wherever He wants us. It means our involvement and commitment and all of these are included here. Remember, God’s will usually test us in our faith, our vision for what He is doing, our love, availability, values, commitment, and involvement, etc.

I am sure when Elijah heard these commands his heart leaped, and perhaps he thought, “Whew, just in time Lord, but that’s sure cutting it close!” As this was going through his mind, he then heard, “to Zarephath.” Zarephath comes from tsaraph, “to smelt, refine, test.” The verb is used metaphorically with the sense of “to refine by means of suffering.” Zarephath means “a smelting place, a place of testing.” God uses various tests to refine us and purge out the dross as in the refining of silver and gold. When Elijah heard this name, he probably thought, “Oh oh, here we go again, but the battle is the Lord’s and He is in control.” Then he heard, “which belongs to Sidon.” “Sidon”? He probably thought, “Lord, Sidon belongs to the land of Jezebel, that old prostitute of Baal worship. Lord, this is the center of Baal worship that is now being promoted in Israel. Yes, I know Lord, it’s still your battle and you know what you are doing. But this sure seems like strange directions.”

(3) The Third Command--“and stay there.” Next, he heard “and stay (yashab, “live, dwell”) there.” He might have thought, “This really takes the cake.” And, as if these were not enough, he then heard something even more strange that had to be a tremendous challenge to his commitment, trust and vision as a man of God who was seeking to serve the Lord.

(4) The Promise--“behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.” Note the very next word, “behold.” This is the Hebrew hinneh, a demonstrative particle used to arrest the attention or to focus the reader’s (or hearer’s) attention on something important. The Lord was dramatically pointing out the reason for going to Zarephath. “I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.” Elijah’s provision would come by human hands, but they were the most unlikely hands he could have imagined. Everything about this was a test for Elijah. Please note the following:

“I have commanded a widow” is an interesting statement. Had the Lord spoken to this Gentile widow? Was she waiting for Elijah to come? I think the content of the text suggests this was not the case. I don’t think she was aware at all of her role in God’s plan. Rather, I believe this expresses the divine will of God. It shows that God commands or wills things to take place and they do. He uses the conditions and dispositions of men and women and brings things to pass.

Let’s say you need a job. When you find a job, it will be because God commanded it. Your new employer may not be aware of it unless he or she is a believer, but it will be because God willed it so. “He sits in the heavens, He does what He pleases” (cf. Isa. 10:5-6 with vs. 7, and Gen. 50:19-21).

“Provide” is the Hebrew word, kul. In Aramaic and Arabic this word means “measure, measure out.” The basic meaning is “calculate,” or “contain” as does a vessel. For instance in Isaiah 40:12 the prophet writes, “who hath calculated or contained the dust of the earth by a measure?” Mainly this verb is used in a causative stem and means “to cause to contain, supply.” It came to be used in the sense of “support, sustain, provide for” (cf. Ps. 55:22; Gen. 50:21; Neh. 9:21). While the Hebrew word used is different, I am reminded of one of the Names of the Lord, “Jehovah Jireh” or “Yahweh Yireh,” meaning “the Lord will provide” (Gen. 22:8 and 14). It comes from the Hebrew ra’ah, “to see” as the Lord foresees and thus provides.
The Lord’s Supply--PROVISION

First, God would provide for Elijah through a woman. While women in Israel had a higher position and status than among their Gentile neighbors, this was highly irregular, for it was the man’s place to provide for women. Second, this was a Gentile woman, a woman outside the circle of God’s own people. In fact, she was from the pagan nation of the Sidonians (or Phoenicians) who, at that time, represented the forces arrayed against God’s kingdom. Third, she was a poor, destitute, depressed widow facing starvation. She wasn’t exactly the kind of person you would go to for support, but she was the person whom God had chosen to be Elijah’s support and the instrument of God’s glory. He didn’t know her plight as yet, but he would soon find out and his response is remarkable.

Note several principles of application:

(1) Remember what God said through Isaiah (Isa. 55:8f, God’s ways are not ours)? We might also remember 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, “but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.” God uses sources and instruments we would never choose, but in His wisdom He chooses them to accomplish His own purposes and to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we could ask or think (Eph. 3:20). We should not be surprised then with the tools God sometimes uses. What would we choose? We would choose a hero kind of figure, a well-known athlete, a rich man or a king, but the Lord chose a destitute widow. We would choose someone brilliant, powerful, perhaps someone in the king’s palace. But God chose a woman from Zarephath of the land of Jezebel. Sure, sometimes God uses the powerful and wealthy as he did with Nehemiah (Neh. 2), or Joseph in the latter chapters of Genesis. The question is, what is our response when He chooses to use the poor and the weak in our lives? Do we despise them? Are we disappointed? Or do we thank Him for what He is doing?

(2) The sources God chooses to use often test our submission and faith. How could God possibly supply through this destitute woman? The how is not important. God would show that in time. God only wants us to trust Him regardless of how things look to us. I remember a story my grandfather used to tell about a dear old lady who truly believed God. One day he said to her, “Mary, I believe if God told you to jump through the wall, you would jump.” She replied, “Yes sir, I would. If God told me to jump, it would be my job to jump and His to make a hole.” How can we rest in God’s supply in situations like this? We need to remember a simple but profound concept. Who would supply Elijah’s need, the woman or the Lord? The Lord, of course! The woman was only an instrument.

Never get your eyes on the instrument or the conditions. Look beyond the instrument to the real source of supply--the Lord. Read again the story of Abraham in Genesis 22. He saw beyond the immediate problem to the Lord’s supply. Often God either chooses the despised and the small, or He reduces our resources to teach us He is really the One who supplies. See Judges 7 for the illustration of Gideon and God’s instruction to him. Lest Israel boast and trust in their own power, the number of men to go up against the Midianites was reduced from 32,000 to 10,000 and finally to 300.

(3) The Lord uses His sources of supply to humble us. Doesn’t He really know how to take the starch of self-dependence and pride totally out of our spiritual shirts in order to bring us to a place where we will really trust Him? Here Elijah was receiving aid at the hands of a destitute widow of the enemies of Israel. How humbling! But also, what an opportunity for the manifestation of God’s grace, love, and power.

(4) Finally, this teaches us God can use any of us. He can take whatever we have and multiply it many times over just as He did with the meager resources of the widow or as the Savior did when feeding the five thousand.

What was Elijah’s response in verse 10? We read, “So he arose and went...” No questions, no arguments, no complaints--just obedience. Undoubtedly, it was in the joy and expectation of not only what the Lord would do for him, but through him. Elijah realized he would be there not simply to be ministered to, but to minister.

By way of application:

• Are you in a spiritual condition where you can hear God’s instructions? (Mark 6:30f.)
• What are you facing in your life right now that needs God’s supply? Are you resting in Him for your needs?
Where is your focus? Are you focused on the problem rather than the Lord? Are you seeing the agents of supply in your life as totally inadequate with the result you are questioning what God can do?

Does your present condition look impossible? Does it look like there is no way God can meet your needs through what He has brought about into your life?

Have you considered that before God meets your need, or that in meeting your need, He wants to use you to meet the need of someone else?

Now we turn to another scene in the life of Elijah. Again, God is preparing him for what is to come. But the story also involves what God is doing in the life of His people, the nation of Israel. Let’s not lose sight of the nationalistic interest here. The story deals with more than simply Elijah or his destiny. It also deals with what God was seeking to do in the northern kingdom. It deals with what the northern kingdom was experiencing because of its idolatry. The nation had turned away from the Lord and His Word to the substitutes of the world.

Elijah forms a model for us. We can learn from Elijah about God and about ourselves—our needs, responsibilities in society, and our tendencies under the pressure of the conflict. On the other hand, Israel forms an example of what happens in a society when it ignores God—it goes down hill fast and becomes morally corrupt.

With this in mind, let’s ask a question. Why did God send the Prophet into the land of the Sidonians and to this widow as His source of supply when there were many widows in Israel with just as great a need? Apart from God’s mercy, His use of this in the life of Elijah and the lessons it has for us in that way, there is another very important lesson here that I would like to address. The answer is found for us in the remarks made by the Lord in Luke 4:23-27. Not only was the nation facing drought and famine in the land, but they were also facing a famine of the Word of God. Because of their indifference, idolatry, and unbelief, God sent Elijah out of the land and to a Gentile widow. This was a form of judgment and has a two-fold significance for us:

This was somewhat prophetic of the church age when, because of Israel’s unbelief, God would turn from Israel as a nation and offer the gospel to the Gentile world. Remnants of Israel would still come to Christ, but from the standpoint of the nation and her promised blessings, she would be temporarily set aside (cf. Rom. 11:6-32). Sending Elijah to the widow reminds us of our responsibility to carry the gospel to all men.

This also teaches us we should never take our blessings for granted. Privilege never guarantees success (1 Cor. 10:1-13). It provides the basis for success, but we need to take heed how we use those blessings. When a nation or individuals ignore the Word and turn to the substitutes of the world, they eventually experience the judgment of God. God may finally turn them over to the futility of their own solutions or strategies for life (Rom. 1:18f; Amos 8:11; 2 Tim. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10-11).

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Due to the nation’s apostasy under King Ahab, God-honoring faith was almost absent in Israel (compare 1 Kings 19:18). So God called an unlikely widow—a foreigner familiar with God only by reputation—to put her trust in Him. Her faith in God was shown through her in obedience, feeding Elijah before providing for her son and herself. She responded to God in faith even though she was not among God’s covenant people. In Jesus’ first public appearance after His temptation, He saw fit to mention the widow as an example of faith. He had returned to Nazareth to worship in the synagogue. After reading a prophecy from the book of Isaiah concerning the anointed one, Jesus proclaimed himself to be the fulfillment of that Scripture (Luke 4:14-30; compare Mark 7:24-30). Though the congregation spoke well of Him momentarily, Jesus’ response to their marveling at a hometown hero infuriated them. He reminded His audience that God hadn’t sent Elijah to any of the widows within the confines of Israel. God had chosen an outsider who would demonstrate obedient faith. The exiles who read these accounts in 1 Kings (see Lesson Context) were reminded as we are that God’s influence is not limited to one group of people or one piece of land. God had not entered into a covenant with the widow’s people. He had not revealed himself to them through the law. But God favored her modest faith by blessing her obedience. God still honors faithful obedience, no matter how tentative those attempts initially are.
Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Elijah's Provision - God sent His servant Elijah to Zarephath. This was enemy territory for Elijah because the evil Queen Jezebel, who sought to wipe him out, came from that area along with her Baal worshipers. Yet, God sent Elijah there and promised to provide through a widow. Elijah arrived at the city gate of Zarephath and there he found a widow gathering sticks. In those days, a wife whose husband died barely survived. By faith, going on God's promise alone, Elijah, a Jewish man, asked a poor Gentile woman for water. When she was on her way to get a cup, he told her to also bring him a morsel of bread. The widow politely respected Elijah's God. She regretfully informed the prophet she didn't have bread, only a little flour and oil which she was preparing for her and her son. It would be their last meal before starving to death.

The Widow's Provision - Elijah declared the Lord would sustain the three through the famine. Neither the pitcher of meal nor the source of oil would run out until the drought ended. And that's what happened. The Lord made good on His promise. Each time she went to get what she needed, He miraculously provided more flower and oil.

God's Lessons in Hard Times - When facing a hopeless situation, like the widow at Zarephath was in, there are important lessons to keep in mind. First, God will provide. We must look beyond the obstacles to seek Him and His direction. He listens to His people and cares for them. Also, we should reflect on the many biblical characters in Scripture who faced extremely hard times, but put their lives in God's hands. Joseph is one example. His jealous brothers tossed him into a pit which eventually landed him second in command to the Pharaoh in Egypt. Without bitterness he told his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20). When God allows His children to go through difficult times, there are many valuable lessons to be learned and great value on the other side: "When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10)