

A Chronicle of Faith  
1 Kings 17:8-20

**Slide 1**

Hebrews 11 has been called God's "Hall of Faith." Like the Hall of Fame in sports or other arenas of life, Hebrews 11 gives us the names and tells us, if ever so briefly, what God's people accomplished "by faith."

We hear such profound accomplishments like:

- "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice."
- "By faith Noah...prepared an ark."
- "By faith Abraham...obeyed."
- "By faith Moses...refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."
- "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish..."

I find it interesting that in this list of people mentioned in God's Hall of Faith, Elijah, whose life was characterized by one act of faith after another is never mentioned—at least not by name.

But in Hebrews 11 a statement is made that I'm convinced God had Elijah in mind.

Hebrews 11:35a, *"Women received back their dead, raised to life again."*

That's exactly what happened in our text today, and the woman wasn't even a woman of great faith!

Today's encounter reveals the power of faith to transform even the most impossible situations.

During this series, “The Elijah Chronicles,” we’ll look at the life of one of God’s greatest prophets. In fact, Elijah’s name means, “The Lord is my God.”

Even though he may have been forgotten in the Hall of Faith, Elijah was the greatest miracle worker of the Bible outside Moses and Jesus.

And those miracles came as a result of his faith. In fact, Elijah appeared with Moses on Mount Tabor when Jesus was transfigured.

So, these next four weeks I want to reflect on this Old Testament prophet to help reveal lessons, for our own lives, that’ll make a difference in our world.

## **Slide 2**

First, I need to set the historical context. Without knowing what was happening during Elijah’s time, we can’t grasp the depth of the lessons.

Prior to Elijah coming on the scene, the nation of Israel had enjoyed great fruitfulness under David and his son, Solomon.

But, when Solomon died, civil war broke out and the nation divided into a northern kingdom (which retained the name Israel, and was governed from Samaria) and a southern kingdom (referred to as Judah, and was governed from Jerusalem).

That division remained until both kingdoms fell to foreign invaders, and the people were led away into captivity.

From the time civil war broke out, until they were led away into captivity (about 200 years), the northern kingdom (Israel) had nineteen kings, and all of them, as the Bible tells us, were wicked.

Over and over, we read the refrain, *“He did evil in the eyes of the LORD.”* Imagine that! Nineteen national leaders and every one of them did evil.

Go back and read 1 Kings 12–16, and you’ll read a litany of bloodshed and assassinations, murder, intrigue, immorality, conspiracy, hatred, deception, and idolatry.

Enter the last of these kings, Ahab where we read in 1 Kings 16:30, *“Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.”*

To make matters worse, Ahab marries Jezebel, the daughter of the King of Sidon, which was the heartland of worship to the god, Baal. She brings Baal worship to Israel with her.

Evil begins in the heart of the person on the throne, and it trickles down into the core of the people.

This is the time when the worst of the worst kings is on the throne of the northern nation of Israel. If ever a nation needed to hear a word from God, this was the time. Enter our hero, the prophet Elijah.

We’re introduced to Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1, *“Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead...”* Elijah appears out of nowhere, and he’s literally from nowhere.

Gilead we can find on the map, but look for Tishbe, and well, you can’t find it. It was an obscure community somewhere east of the Jordan River. Yet, out of nowhere, God showed up.

Ahab and Jezebel controlled Israel, and Baal was the god they worshiped. Now, think about this: Even when the spiritual chasm between God and His people was at its widest, God was there.

Here's the first lesson we need to learn from the chronicles of Elijah: though we drift far away, God never abandons us. God is never far away.

Individually, we may drift away from God, bound in some sin we can't overcome, but God will send someone to remind us that He has not abandoned us.

As a nation, it may seem like we've turned our back on God, but God has not abandoned us. We must remember that God is God and we're not!

So, Elijah shows up before King Ahab and announces, *"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."*

It's important to understand what Elijah was saying. Israel was worshipping Baal. Baal was the god of rain and fertility. Therefore, Elijah was saying, *"Ahab, I'm going to show you who the real God is."*

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That's all Elijah says. God then tells him to run out into the wilderness and it's from the wilderness that we pick up today's passage.

After a period in the wilderness, where God provided for his physical needs, God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath in Sidon. He is told to find a widow that God has prepared to care for his needs.

It so happens that Zarephath is over 100 miles in the other direction, back across the territory from which he fled.

Think about this for a moment. God asks Elijah to go into enemy territory (Sidon is the capital of Baal worship), to find a widow (widows are the least of all society) with a son (widows can't take care of themselves, much less children).

This is as far out of Elijah's comfort zone as it can get, but what can he do? He goes. He lives in obedience.

This is the second lesson we learn from the chronicles of Elijah: Living a life of faith requires obedience.

Of all the places Elijah might choose to go, Zarephath is not on top of the list. It's probably not even ON the list. Now, Zarephath means "smelting-shop," or a workshop for the refining and smelting of metals.

It was noted for the furnaces where skilled craftsmen worked with metals. A dark, smoky, smelly place. Being sent to Zarephath was like putting your hand in a snake pit and wondering if you're going to get bit!

God was literally sending Elijah out of the frying pan, and into the fire! Yet, faith is no faith until there is... What? Obedience.

Elijah chose to go where God was sending. Even to an unlikely place. Even to an unlikely person.

Imagine, you're a foreigner who just walked 100 miles of desert, and you stumble into Zarephath.

You're thirsty and hungry. You sit down and notice a widow gathering sticks and think... *"Hmmm, I wonder if this is the widow God told me about!"*

*"Excuse me, Ma'am, but could you spare a glass of water? Oh, and while you're at it, maybe get me a biscuit, too?"*

Elijah didn't know what he was getting himself into, because when he added on that phrase, *"get me a biscuit, too,"* something in that little old lady snapped and she came unglued.

The pressure and frustration of trying to make ends meet as a single mom in the middle of a drought came pouring out.

*“Seriously? I don’t have any bread! In fact, all I’ve got for my son and me is a handful of flour in a jar and a little bit of oil. And the reason I’m out here gathering sticks is so I can go home, make a fire and prepare our last meal. Then, we’re just going to die!”*

I would have said, *“Whoa, sorry I asked!”*

It sounds almost selfish, doesn’t it? Here’s Elijah telling this poor widow to go ahead and make a cake for her and her son, but while you’re at it, make one for me, too.

Elijah wasn’t intimidated. He knew enough about God that this must be the widow whom God wanted him to meet.

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So, Elijah, acting in faith, becomes a blessing to her. That’s the third lesson we’re to learn about the life of faith: We can’t get a blessing without being a blessing!

The very person who was supposed to provide for Elijah, God is now asking him to provide for her! Don’t you think that’s going to take a little humility on his part? But that’s the way it works in God’s economy!

God makes sure that both the giver and the receiver eventually switch positions! The receiver becomes the giver and the giver becomes the receiver! See, you can’t be a receiver unless you’re willing to be a giver.

In the same way, you can’t be a giver, unless at some point you’re willing to put your pride aside and become a receiver!

Somehow, and I haven't got this all figured out yet, God puts people together who need each other's different gifts. When that happens, they are able to help each other find a solution to one another's personal droughts!

Elijah and this widow needed each other! Elijah needed food, and this woman needed faith.

This woman had food, but it wouldn't last very long without Elijah's faith. They became a blessing to each other, and God did great things for both of them.

Again, it required obedience to see the blessing of faith. If we want to see God's blessing in our lives, we have to take that step of faith, the risk of faith.

In miracle after miracle in the bible, God expected individuals or groups to take a step of faith, to take some kind of risk, to take some action before the need was met.

In the story of the parting of the Red Sea, Moses had to stretch out His hand over the water before it parted. Before the walls of Jericho fell, people had to walk around the city for 7 days.

Jesus required a blind man to wash out the mud he put on his eyes in the Pool of Siloam before he could see again.

God doesn't require us to step out in faith to embarrass us, or to make us feel silly. God doesn't do it to get a good laugh at our expense. No! God wants to use us to transform His creation, and that takes a commitment of faith.

Most of the time we only think of what the widow had to give, but we forget that Elijah had to give too!

Remember, he was in the same boat as this woman, out of food and water, but he gave this woman hope and faith!

If instead of despairing, we learn to give out of our need, to give help when we're helpless, to give hope when we're hopeless, or to give faith when we're faithless, then God will give us an inexhaustible supply of all these.

Because this widow gave out of her need, she met God in the kitchen three times a day! Three times a day she looked in the flour barrel and found flour. Three times a day she looked in the jar and found oil.

Can't you hear her singing, *"Praise God from whom all biscuits flow?"*

Elijah's faith brought this pagan woman to faith. He gave what he had, and she gave what she had, and both of their lives were changed.

All over this world, around us every day, are people who're looking for the truth to be lived out in the lives of those who claim it.

Just like the widow watched Elijah, there are people watching us. They hear what we say we believe, but mainly they're watching to see what we do.

## **Slide 5**

### Conclusion

Three lessons found in this chronicle of faith:

- God has not abandoned us.
- The life of faith requires obedience, and...
- To get a blessing I must be a blessing.

If we live those lessons, we might just see the miracle of death being transformed into life.

And remember, a little faith goes a long way. But, it's not the amount of faith we have that matters, it's the measure of the God in which our faith resides.

Elijah's faith was in the God who could give the rain or stop the rain, in the God who could dry up a brook, in the God who could give a continuing supply of oil, and in the God who could overcome death with life.

Which He did. Not only in this widow's son, but in His own son, on the cross at Calvary.

It's not until we stand in the face of death that the power of faith is made fully known. That's the faith which changes the world and changes us.