

The city was enlarged when Solomon came to the throne and built the House of the Forest of Lebanon and the house for Pharaoh's daughter. The Temple Mount, the platform on which Herod's Temple and the earlier temples were built, cannot be excavated; but using all the available information some impressive reconstructions have been made that can be perused in the book.

The concluding section, on the Temple Mount today, makes the interesting suggestion that a rectangular depression on the top of Mount Moriah (enclosed within the Dome of the Rock today) was the place where the ark rested in a

stable position within the holy of holies, the measurements of which are shown to agree with the suggested siting of the ark.¹

This book is strongly bound, and is suitable for use by all ages. It is good value for money, with its large coloured maps and illustrations. It is strongly recommended for family groups, Sunday school teachers and youth workers, and for Bible study and Bible classes.

1. See Brother Ritmeyer's article, "The temple and the ark of the covenant" (Feb. 1996, p. 63), for more about this.

Lessons from the life of Elijah

6. "Women received their dead raised to life again" (1 Kgs. 17:21-24)

Stephen Whitehouse

WHAT A WONDERFUL spiritual character we have before us in Elijah! He was such a great prophet of the Lord, yet he was still prepared to associate himself with the affliction of the widow and focus all his efforts on alleviating her distress at losing her son. Here we observe a man who could empathise with those around him, a wonderful quality for any servant of God.

We saw in the [previous article](#) how Elijah took the widow's son, laid him on his bed and prayed to God. We now see in a remarkable miracle the answer of God to the prophet's prayer.

"He stretched himself upon the child three times"

As soon as the prophet had expressed his heart to his God, "he stretched himself upon the child" (1 Kgs. 17:21). This was done to bring down the vivifying power of God upon the dead body, and thereby support his own prayer, as did Elisha with the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kgs. 4:34).

The Hebrew for "stretched" (*madad*) is usually rendered 'measured'. The same word is used in connection with the manna which the children of Israel had to gather for themselves: "when they did mete [*madad*] it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he

that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating" (Ex. 16:18).

Moreover, Moses was commanded to take an omer of manna, place it in a golden pot and lay it in the ark of the covenant, so that the children of Israel "may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt" (v. 32). This spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incorruptible bread, who said of himself: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (Jno. 6:51).

Elijah knew that figuratively an omer of manna had been daily provided to the widow and her son.¹ Yet the household had eaten of this daily provision and one had perished. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ are most appropriate: "your fathers did eat manna, and are dead" (v. 58). The prophet is now desperate for the provision, as it were, of the manna which never corrupted, which lay in the golden pot and was placed in the ark of the covenant.

In relation to this request for a new manna portion, note that the prophet "stretched himself upon the child three times" (1 Kgs. 17:21). The

1. See [Oct. 2004, p. 385](#).

number three speaks of the principle of resurrection, for it was on the third day that the earth was caused to rise up out of the water (Gen. 1:9-13) and that Jesus rose from the dead (Mt. 12:39,40).

“Let this child’s soul come into him again”

We can discern that Elijah did not feel shackled by the Law. He refused to be hindered by anything other than his God. This is evident since the Law stated that it was defilement to come into contact with a dead body (Num. 19:11), yet he did so without any hesitation. Once stretched out in total contact with the child he again cried, “O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s soul come into him again”. Elijah had feared that God had overlooked this mother and child, yet the psalmist declared, “the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their *soul* from death, and to keep them alive in famine” (Ps. 33:18,19). The “eye of the LORD” was upon them all, and He would hearken and respond.

This touching scene is even more astonishing when it is appreciated that at no other time prior to this miracle had anyone been raised from the dead. Yet Elijah quietly and confidently took the child and requested God that his life be restored. This was an earnest prayer for a miracle of majestic proportions, a prayer without constraint or limitation, because he had become so emotionally involved with this family. He simply could not bear to behold the child as a corpse.

“The LORD heard the voice of Elijah”

Once Elijah had besought the mercy of God, there was an immediate response: “the LORD heard the voice of Elijah” (1 Kgs. 17:22). The Hebrew for “heard” indicates a person hearing attentively. The Father’s ears were open to Elijah’s cry. He was ready to grant Elijah his earnest request, confirming that “the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers” (1 Pet. 3:12).

What a powerful demonstration of the efficacy of prayer! All may seem hopeless to man, but to the Father all things are possible. Let us have confidence in the power of prayer, as the Apostle John exhorted: “this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us” (1 Jno. 5:14). How it must have thrilled and humbled the prophet that he had been heard by the Creator, having played the role of intercessor!

The hand of God had restored the child back to life. Throughout the Scriptures we are reminded of the healing power of the Almighty, Who is known by the title “the LORD That healeth thee” (Ex. 15:26).

It was in another upper room that Christ prepared his disciples for his imminent death by saying, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jno. 14:6). On another poignant occasion Jesus called his good friend, Lazarus, from the grave after saying, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jno. 11:25,26, NIV). The Lord Jesus, as Elijah, stretched himself across mankind as it were when he was stretched out on the accursed tree: “. . . who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10).

“See, thy son liveth”

These miracles all foreshadowed the great victory which would be wrought through the life, death and glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). This victory greatly contrasted with the efforts of Baal, since according to ancient mythology it was believed that Baal could only defeat death for a time, and would have to succumb to it again later.

The child was taken immediately from the chamber and returned to his mother (1 Kgs. 17:23), a striking similarity to the way the Master, after restoring to life the only son of the widow of Nain, “delivered him to his mother” (Lk. 7:15). Again, this prophet of Gilead prefigured the work of Christ. Imagine the scene: there, standing before the astonished eyes of his mother, was her lad, who only moments before had been dead. What a joyous moment this must have been for all!

Elijah then speaks forth with great conviction: “See, thy son liveth” (v. 23). The Hebrew for “see”, *ra’ah*, means ‘inspect’, ‘perceive’ or ‘consider’. The prophet desires that the woman closely examines and ponders the power and might of the Lord. Elijah used the same word for ‘liveth’ when he declared to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth” (v. 1), as did the widow when she affirmed, “the LORD thy God liveth”

(v. 12). Without the life of Yahweh there would be no life in the boy.

This is certainly a lesson for us. Through the power of God's Word we are to observe, perceive and consider the death and glorious resurrection of our friend and Master. And just as the Apostle Paul testified, "if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain" (1 Cor. 15:17), we too are to be fully confident that, through the power of God, he now lives, and sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, soon to return to establish the Kingdom.

"Now by this I know that thou art a man of God"

The widow would have been in no doubt that this was her son, standing and breathing again. It must have been almost too much to grasp; she would have felt at one moment that everything had been snatched away, and now all had been restored. In response she declares: "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God" (1 Kgs. 17:24). The miracle had utterly convinced her of the power of the God of Israel and His saving work of redemption.

Right from the beginning she was aware of the God of Israel, for she had referred to "the LORD thy God" (v. 12) at her first meeting with the prophet. Once she had witnessed the barrel of meal never wasting, nor the cruse of oil failing, she knew that Elijah's God was the true Elohim, the only living God, even Eloah Himself. But she still was not converted in heart, soul or mind; it would take a miracle of such grand and majestic proportions as this to win her finally. Now, staring at the evidence of the power of the resurrection, she was inwardly convinced. In these words we see the final victory of faith, brought about by the crowning mercy of the restoration of her son.

The widow informs Elijah that by this act she now knows God. This word "know" is revealing, since the Hebrew can be rendered 'know by experience' or 'learn to know'. The relationship between the widow and the God of Israel had been developing for a time and was well nurtured, but was not ripe until now. It took the loss of her beloved son and his resurrection from the dead for her belief finally to mature so that it could "bring forth fruit" (Mk. 4:20; Jno. 15:16; Rom. 7:4).

The widow, in describing Elijah as a "man of God", was using a phrase used of Moses (Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6) and Shemaiah, a prophet in the

reign of Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 12:22-24). The widow's words connect both Moses and Shemaiah with the work of Elijah. She had experienced many things that would have reminded her of the children of Israel being led through the wilderness by Moses, and how he had acted as a mediator between them and God. She had witnessed a man like Moses, as a faithful servant, providing her daily with manna in the 'wilderness' of Zarephath and interceding between her and God.

She had also just observed how God had hearkened to the faithful prayer of Elijah. How wonderful it is, then, that the name Shemaiah means, 'Whom the LORD heard'! God had certainly heard the prayer of this faithful prophet, and her son had been restored, and because of this she spontaneously rejoices. In this simple, yet profound statement, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God", we observe the deep Scriptural understanding of the woman, most probably developed by daily meditation on God's Word, as guided by Elijah.

"The word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth"

We now finally witness the total conversion of this widow, for she proclaimed, "the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth" (1 Kgs. 17:24). She was openly declaring that the word spoken by Elijah was unlike anything she had heard before. She surely thought in her heart: "Never man spake like this man" (Jno. 7:46). It was new and exciting.

We too know that the words which God utters to us through the daily reading of His Word are truth. John recorded: "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and *truth*" (1:14). This truth should dwell in us as it did within the Master.

The widow had been convinced and would now heed all the words of this man; she was now prepared to serve the God of Israel, just as the children of Israel had previously been commanded: "And now, Israel . . . fear the LORD thy God . . . walk in all His ways . . . love Him . . . serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul . . . keep the commandments of the LORD, and His statutes" (Deut. 10:12,13). Unlike the children of Israel, she responded instinctively from her heart, she had been converted, her heart and mind had been changed, and she was truly repentant.

The faith of Elijah and the widow woman had been tested to the extreme. Many widows would have lost children during this period of hunger and starvation (Lk. 4:25), but God's grace rested upon this particular woman. She was carefully selected for His purpose. Though she was a Gentile, God knew that her heart would be converted and that she would finally respond in faith.

Let us not forget that this lowly widow demonstrated considerable faith, not just at this moment of victory over death, but throughout her time with Elijah. As the writer to the Hebrews testified: "Women received their dead raised to life again" (Heb. 11:35). Could this be describing the faith of this widow, a woman who subsequently "obtained a good report" (v. 2) and who now has the firm assurance of inhabiting a heavenly city (v. 16)?

Why was such an acute test required by God to prove His faithful servants? Surely it was so

that they both might learn to know God and ultimately be transformed into His image (Col. 3:10). The trying of Elijah's faith wrought patience (Jas. 1:3) and resulted in the widow's conversion, or at the very least in the confirmation of her faith and in the glory and praise of God. And it was at Zarephath, the 'place of refining',² within this crucible, that God Himself sat "as a refiner and purifier of silver" (Mal. 3:3) and truly purged them.

Why was this necessary? In order that He could make up His precious collection of glistening jewels (v. 17). For both of these individuals shine forth as fine examples of faith, a faith "much more precious than of gold that perisheth" (1 Pet. 1:7).

(To be continued)

2. See [Sept. 2004, p. 353](#).

Another look at the woman at the well

Alan Fowler

THE WOMAN at the well of Sychar is a fascinating character, but not infrequently she is loaded with a burden of guilt that tends to overshadow her admirable qualities. It has been said that Jesus "exposed her sordid background" and that, as Dean Alford expressed it, "This woman had been vainly seeking solace at the broken cisterns of carnal lust".

What is overlooked is that she is not condemned by the Gospel writer, nor by Jesus, nor by her compatriots, nor by her own conscience after she had recognised Jesus as the Messiah. So what is the truth regarding her character, the disclosure that she had had five husbands and that she was living with a man who was not her husband? We believe the answer may be found in Samaritan beliefs and customs.

Samaritan beliefs

As soon as the Samaritan woman realised that Jesus was a prophet she confronted him with the issue that separated Jews from Samaritans, namely, the site of the temple. The Samaritans accepted the Pentateuch as the only inspired writings and they rejected the rest of the Jewish Scriptures. The Samaritan Pentateuch contained

an addition to the tenth commandment in Exodus 20:17 which decreed that the temple was to be built on Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessings (Deut. 11:29). To support this addition, the Samaritan version of Deuteronomy 27:4 changed Ebal, the mount of cursings, to Gerizim, and added Gerizim in connection with Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18) and with the offering of Isaac (22:2).

Apart from these geographical changes, the laws in the Samaritan Pentateuch are substantially the same as in the Jewish (Massoretic) Pentateuch, and the Samaritans observed the laws of Moses with the same attention to detail as the Jews, possibly more so, as a second-century Jewish patriarch, Simon ben Gamaliel, declared: "Every command the Samaritans keep, they are more scrupulous in observing than Israel". It is relevant to our enquiry that the Samaritans were particularly scrupulous about the laws of defilement and the purifications required, which used large amounts of water.

In spite of sharing a common set of laws, the Jews and Samaritans in New Testament times had become totally separated. The Samaritans were demonised by Jews (Jno. 8:48). Samaritan women were regarded as being ritually unclean