

BIBLE WOMEN – Lesson 13

Athaliah – The Widow of Zaraphath - Two Women Elisha Helped

I. ATHALIAH

- A. Very often we find that evil begets evil, and that was true in the case of king Ahab and Jezebel, who caused Israel to sin by promoting idol worship in Israel.
1. Ahab's son, Ahaziah became king after Ahab died, and he followed the ways of his father and mother and did evil in the eyes of the Lord.
 - a. The Lord's anger was aroused against Ahaziah because he followed the same path as his father had. **I Kings 22:51-53**
 - b. When Ahaziah had reigned only two years, he fell through a lattice and his injuries resulted in his death a little later. This was the fulfillment of God's judgment against Ahab for the death of Naboth. **I Kings 21:28**
 - c. Since Ahaziah had no children, his younger brother, Joram became king of Israel and he also did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not as evil as his parents had been. **2 Kings 3:2-3**
 2. Jezebel was the epitome of an "evil queen". Her influence was not limited to Israel, but through her daughter, Judah was also corrupted.
 - a. When Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, died his son Jehoram, became king in his place.
 - b. He was thirty-two years old when he became king and he reigned in Judah eight years. **2 Kings 8:16-17**
 - 1) Jehoram was the first of the kings of Judah to fully turn away from God by turning Israel away from God to the worship of idols.
 - 2) Jerhoram married, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. He followed the ways of her family, instead of his own father Jehoshaphat. **Vs. 18 and Vs. 26**
 - 3) The first born son of Athaliah and king Jehoram of Judah was Ahaziah, who was twenty-two when he became king of Judah. He also followed the evil example of his grandfather, Ahab.
 - 4) Athaliah's lineage includes some of the most evil rulers in the history of Israel.
 - a.) She was the granddaughter of Omri, the ninth king of Israel who he did more evil than any king before him. **1 Kings 16:25**
 - a.) She was the daughter of Jezebel and Ahab, renown for their evil work in Israel. **I Kings 16:26**
 - b.) It is no surprise that Athaliah was an evil influence in Judah when she married king Jehoram.
 3. Remember that God had previously pronounced total destruction on the house of Ahab. **I Kings 21:19-24**

- a. God chose Jehu, son of Nimshe to replace Ahaziah as king AND to wipe out every member of Ahab's family. **2 Kings 10:11**
 - b. King Ahaziah was also killed by Jehu.
- B. When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah in order to claim the throne for herself. **2 Chronicles 22:10**
1. At this time Jehosheba, the daughter of king Jehoram and Athaliah, was married to the high priest Jehoiada. She was king Ahaziah's sister.
 - a. When she saw that her mother was killing the whole royal family (her own children and grandchildren), Jehosheba took the infant son of Ahaziah and hid him from Athalia and he survived. **2 Chron. 22:11**
 - b. The child, Joash, remained with his aunt Jehosheba for six years while Athaliah ruled as queen of Judah (the only queen that ever ruled over God's chosen people). **Vs. 12**
 2. In the seventh year of Athaliah's reign as queen, the high priest, Jehoiada took action to have Joash anointed as the king of Judah.
 - a. He gathered all of the Levites and the heads of the Israelite families from all of the towns in Judah.
 - b. He assembled them in Jerusalem and explained that King Ahaziah's son had survived and was the rightful king of Judah.
 - c. Jehoiada convinced them to protect the child so that he could be made king. **2 Chronicles 23:9-10**
 - d. Jehoiada placed the crown on the boy and presented him with a copy of the Law of Moses and they all proclaimed him king, shouting "Long live the king!" **Vs. 11**
 3. When Athaliah heard the noise of the people, she went to them at the temple of the Lord and shouted, "Treason!" (Of course, she didn't consider killing all of her children and grandchildren to secure her position as queen as treason, I suppose.)
 - a. Jehoiada, the priest, instructed the commanders of the soldiers to bring her back.
 - b. They were to kill anyone who followed her and that they should not kill her at the temple. **Vs. 14**
 - c. They captured her at a gate of the palace and put her to death there.
 4. Jehoiada then made a covenant with the people to tear down the temple of Baal.
 - a. They also tore down the altars and the idols Athaliah had built.
 - b. Then they killed the priest of Baal.
 - c. Jehoiada then took Joash to the palace and seated him on the royal throne.
 - d. All of the people rejoiced and the city was calm because Athaliah was dead.

5. Joash was seven years old when he became king and he reigned forty years. **2 Chronicles 24:1**
 - a. During his reign he repaired the temple and replaced its furnishings which had been destroyed while Ahaziah and Athaliah ruled. This took many years to accomplish.
 - b. Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as long as Jehoiada lived.
 - c. But when the priest, Jehoiada died, the people reverted back to worshiping idols again.
 - d. God sent prophets to warn them of their sin, but they would not listen. God even sent Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, but by order of king Joash, Zechariah was stoned to death. **2 Chronicles 24:21**
 - e. Because the king and the people had forsaken God, He allowed the army of Aram to defeat Judah and plunder the land of its valuables.
 6. King Joash was severely wounded. **2 Chronicles 24:25**
 - a. His officials conspired against him for murdering Zechariah.
 - b. They murdered Joash in his bed, but he was not buried among the tombs of the kings.
- C. It is difficult to imagine two more evil women than Jezebel and her daughter, Athaliah.
1. They were both in positions of power where they might have made a very positive contribution to the nations of Israel and Judah.
 - a. Science has debated whether a person is more influenced by their environment or their genes (inherited traits).
 - b. Even within the last one hundred years or so in America, some have insisted that "bad blood" is passed from one generation to another and that one is doomed to be either good or evil based on their ancestors.
 2. In **Ezekiel 18** God sent a strong message to the people of Israel on this very subject. He said:
 - a. The people have a proverb that says, "*The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.*" **Ezekiel 18:2**
 - b. God said, "*you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.*" ⁴ "*Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.*" **Vs. 3**
 - c. Then He gave some specific examples:
 - 1) Suppose a righteous man obeys God's commands and does all that he should to please God. **Vs. 5-8**
 - 2) That man is righteous and he will surely live. **Vs. 9**
 - 3) However, this righteous man has a violent son, who shed blood, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, and worships idols.

- 4) Will this man live because his father was righteous? The answer "He will NOT."
 - 5) Then suppose that this son also has a son who sees all of the sins of his father and yet he does not do such things himself. Instead he gives food to the hungry, provides clothing for the naked and he does not mistreat anyone.
 - 6) This son of the third generation will not be punished for the sins of his father.
 - 7) Conclusion: The son does not share the guilt of his father since he has done what is just and right and kept the Lord's commandments.
 - a.) The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them. **Vs. 20**
 - b.) If a wicked person turns away from his sins and keeps the commandments of God, then he will also live. None of his offenses will be remembered against him. But because of the righteous things he has done, he will live. **Vs. 21**
 - c.) If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin and does the same wicked deeds as the wicked person does, then none of the righteous things that a person has done will be remembered. Because of his unfaithfulness, he will be guilty of the sins he has committed and he will die. **Vs. 24**
 - d.) God will judge each according to his own ways, therefore, repent and live! **Vs. 30**
 - e.) This should be very comforting to God's people. We each have control of our soul's destiny, depending upon our faithful obedience to God. That is still true for Christians today.
- D. While Jezebel and Athaliah were definitely influenced by the evil of their parents, they are not excused from their own evil deeds.
1. No one is so evil that he cannot turn to God in repentance and begin to live a righteous life.
 2. Good and evil are choices that everyone who lives must make for themselves.
 3. Righteous parents can teach their children to be righteous, but they cannot "be righteous for them".
 4. Jesus said, **Matthew 5:6** – "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.*"
 - a. That hunger is filled by the word of God.

- b. **Hebrews 5:12-14** – *"¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."*
- c. We cannot distinguish good from evil by using standards set by men. Only the word of God can help us know what is good and what is evil.
- d. Jezebel and Athaliah had the same opportunity to choose good, but they chose evil instead. And there was no limitation to the evil they practiced.

II. THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH (of Sidon)

- A. The time period of the events about the Widow of Zarephath occurred while Ahab was still king in Israel and Jezebel was killing the prophets of God.
 - 1. I skipped these events so that the lineage of the Jezebel and Athaliah could be established more clearly.
 - 2. Elijah was the prophet when Ahab was king of Israel. **I Kings 17**
 - a. He informed Ahab that God was going to withhold rain in the land for a few years. **Vs. 1**
 - b. Elijah left Ahab and God told him to go eastward to hide in the Kerith Ravine. There the ravens provided Elijah with bread and meat every morning and every evening and he drank from the brook.
 - c. After a while the brook dried up because there was no rain.
 - d. God told Elijah to go to Zarephath where he would meet a widow whom God had directed to give food to Elijah.
 - e. So Elijah went to Zarapheth and saw a widow gathering sticks.
 - f. He called out to her and asked her to bring him a little water in a jar and a piece of bread. **Vs. 10-11**
 - g. The widow told Elijah that she didn't have any bread, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug.
 - h. She was gathering sticks to build a fire to bake a little bread for her and her son, which would be their last meal before starving to death.
 - i. Elijah said, **I Kings 17:13-14** – *"¹³ Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.'"*
 - j. The widow went away and did as Elijah had told her.

- 1) There was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her son. **Vs. 15**
- 2) The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, just as the Lord had promised.
3. Some time later the son of the widow became ill.
 - a. He grew worse and worse and finally he stopped breathing.
 - b. She went to Elijah and said, *"What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"*
 - c. Elijah took the boy from her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.
 - d. Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, *"LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Vs. 20*
 - e. Then Elijah stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, *"Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him.!"*
 - f. The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.
 - g. Elijah carried the boy down and gave him to his mother alive.
 - h. The widow said, *"Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."*
- B. I can't even imagine the faith it would take to give a stranger the very last few bites of food you have to feed your only child, knowing that they would soon starve to death.
 1. The lack of rain had resulted in a severe famine in the land.
 2. The little bit of flour and oil was not only her last bit of food, she had no hope of finding more food.
 3. Everyone was suffering from the famine, but a widow with no husband to help provide for the family made her circumstances ever more severe.
 4. The Law of Moses provided for the poor and hungry by allowing them to gather what was left in the fields after the reapers harvested the crops.
 5. With no rain for three years, there were no crops in the fields to harvest which meant that the poor were worse off than anyone else.
 6. God chose this woman to reinforce Elijah's own faith as well.
 - a. Elijah had been brutally persecuted by Ahab and Jezebel.
 - b. He was so discouraged he wanted to die.
 - c. He thought that he was the only one left who was faithful to God.
 - d. Imagine how impressed Elijah must have been to see the amazing faith of this woman.
 7. God used their dire situation to magnify the fact that He is still in control and that He takes care of His own.

- C. While we have not witnessed such miracles ourselves, these records have been preserved by God to encourage us still today.
1. Jesus teaches a lesson on trusting God to care for His children in **Luke 12:22-31** – "²²Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. ²³Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? ²⁵And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁶If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? ²⁹And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. ³⁰For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."
 2. The widow of Zarapheth, and perhaps even Elijah, learned this lesson in an amazing way.
 3. Stress is considered a great contributor to many health problems. How much more stressed could one be than to have to watch your only child starve to death before your very eyes and have no way to stop it.
 4. How grateful to God she must have been for his loving care.
 5. Think how much less stress we would have in our lives if we could give up worrying about "tomorrow" and just be thankful for the blessings of "today".

III. Women helped by Elisha – The Widow's Oil – The Shunamite Woman

- A. When Elijah's work was finished, God took Him up into heaven in a chariot of fire. **2 Kings 2**
- B. Elisha was selected to take Elijah's place at about the same time that Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat became king in Judah.
 1. Elisha began performing miracles immediately after receiving a double portion of the spirit from Elijah:
 - a. He crossed the Jordan River on dry land. **2 Kings 2:14**
 - b. He turned a bad water supply into pure water for a city. **Vs 19-22**
 2. **2 Kings 4:1** – A widow who was the wife of one of the sons of the prophets came to Elisha seeking help.
 - a. She said, "My husband, who feared the Lord, is dead. His creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves."

- b. Elisha asked, *"What shall I do for you? What do you have in your house"*
 - c. She replied, *"I have nothing in the house but a jar of oil."* **Vs. 2**
 - d. Then he said, *"Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors – empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour your oil into all of those vessels, and set aside the full ones."* **Vs. 3-4**
 - e. The widow did as Elisha commanded and she began to pour the oil into the vessels.
 - f. She filled one vessel after another until she had filled every vessel. **Vs. 6**
 - g. Elisha told her to go and sell the oil and pay her debt so that her sons would not be taken as slaves.
3. This widow had done all she could to feed her son during the famine, yet when she was called upon to help someone else, she did not hesitate.
- a. This woman stands on the same plane as the poor woman in **Mark 12:41-44**. ⁴¹ *Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.* ⁴² *Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.* ⁴³ *So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."*
 - b. These two minas equaled 1/8 of the value of the Greek's smallest coin.
 - c. It is surprising that this poor woman contributed anything at all since she was so very poor.
 - d. Not only did she contribute, but she didn't even hold one coin back for herself.
 - e. In all likelihood, she wished that she could have given more, but this was all she had.
 - f. No doubt, she felt that such a little contribution would not make much difference in the treasury of the Lord, but she very much wanted to help anyway, unlike Ananias and Sapphira who exaggerated the amount of their gift in order to receive the praise of men. **Acts 5:1-6**
 - g. We could certainly learn a lot from these two women about generosity.

- h. Not only were they generous, which is easy when you have an abundance yourself, but they were generous in a sacrificial way. They did not give from an abundance.
 - i. They truly practiced the teaching that Paul later gave to Christians in **Philippians 2:4** – *"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."*
- C. The second woman Elisha helped lived in Shumen and she was well known in the community, although her name is not given. **2 Kings 4:8**
- 1. The woman offered food to Elisha who was visiting there.
 - a. Afterward, Elisha visited her home often when he was passing by.
 - b. The woman told her husband that Elisha was a man of God and that he came to their town regularly.
 - c. She wanted to build a small room with a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp stand that would always be available to Elisha when he came to their town. **Vs. 9-10**
 - d. After a while, Elisha sent his servant, Gehazi, to ask this woman what Elisha could do for her in appreciation for her generosity.
 - e. Gehazi told Elisha that the woman had no children and her husband was old.
 - f. Elisha called the woman to him and said, *"About this time next year you shall embrace a son."* **Vs. 16**
 - g. The woman could hardly believe her ears and said, *"You are a man of God. Don't lie to me."*
 - h. Elisha's prophecy came true and she gave birth to a son the next year.
 - 2. As the child grew, one day as he was helping his father and some servants with reaping, he said, *"My head! My head!"* **Vs. 18**
 - a. The servants carried the boy back to his mother, who held him on her lap until noon and then he died.
 - b. The woman asked her husband to get her one of the donkeys so that she could go to the man of God and bring him back. **Vs. 22**
 - c. When Elisha saw her coming from far off, he sent Gehazi out to meet her and find out if everything was alright with her family.
 - d. When she approached Elisha she fell down at his feet in deep distress and said, *"Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'"* She couldn't understand why Elisha had offered to give her a son only for God to take him back in death.
 - e. Elisha told Gehazi to get ready to take his staff and place it on the face of the child. Gehazi was not to stop to speak to anyone along the way.
 - f. The woman refused to go back without Elisha, so they followed Gehazi back to the boy who was lying dead on his bed.

- g. Elisha went in, shut the door and prayed to God, then Elisha stretched out his body over the boys (with his eyes on the boys eyes, his hands on the boy's hands, etc.) **Vs. 34**
 - h. The boy's flesh became warm. Then Elisha paced back and forth and then stretched out his body over the child again.
 - i. After this the child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.
 - j. Elisha told Gehazi to bring the woman and when she came Elisha said, "*Pick up your son.*"
 - k. When the woman saw that her son was alive, she fell down at the feet of Elisha. Then she picked up her son.
3. This woman also reminds us of the teaching of Paul in **Galatians 6:9-10**
⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."
4. The Shunamite woman certain did reap a positive reward for her unselfish kindness toward Elisha.
- D. At the beginning of this lesson we mentioned that "evil begets evil". Fortunately, the same is true of kindness and generosity.
1. When we are kind to others, they may be inspired to show kindness to us or to others.
 2. Imagine how our country and the world would change if we could raise up a generation of children grew who learned to be kind and generous.
 3. Violence would be eliminated, the poor would all be taken care of, loneliness would relieved, bigotry and prejudices would disappear.
 4. I wish I could understand why it is so hard for people to live together in peace; the only answer is that Satan is still
 5. alive and well and prowls the earth "*like a roaring lion seeking whom he may destroy.*" **I Peter 5:8**