

ONWORD

A weekly publication of the Enterprise Church of Christ

Surviving Financial Stress

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Join us:

Sundays

- Bible class, 9 am
 Morning worship, 10 am
 Evening worship, 5:30 pm

Wednesdays

- Midweek Bible study, 7 pm

Contact us:

- 1005 CR 14, Myrtle, MS 38650
 662-534-9525
 Web: EnterpriseChurch.org
 Twitter: @EnterpriseCOC
 Facebook & Instagram:
 enterprisechurchofchrist

Surviving Financial Stress: Oil in the Cupboard

By Jay Tidwell

Elijah and Elisha were a powerful tandem of prophets in ancient Israel. After Elijah was taken up to heaven, Elisha carried on the ministry of awakening the people to the presence of God. In **Second Kings 4:1-7**, Elisha helped a widow of one of the religious teachers remember that the Lord provides for those who trust in Him and follow His plan for life: *“Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” 2 And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?” And she said, “Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” 3 Then he said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. 4 Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.” 5 So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. 6 When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another.” Then the oil stopped flowing. 7 She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts,*

Extra Credit:

“It was common in the ancient Near East for creditors to enslave the children of debtors who could not pay. The Mosaic Law also permitted this practice (Exod. 21:2-4, Lev. 25:39). However, servitude in Israel was to end on the Year of Jubilee. God provided miraculously for the dire needs of this widow who had put God first, in contrast to the majority who did not do so in Israel (cf. Matt. 6:33). According to Jewish tradition, this woman was the widow of Obadiah, King Ahab's steward, who had secretly provided for Yahweh's prophets (cf. 1 Kings 18:3-4). God's miraculous multiplication of oil symbolized the adequacy of God's Spirit to provide all that the widow needed. [Oil] is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lev. 8; 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13; Luke 11:13; et al.). ‘The vessels were the measure of the oil. In other words, divine power waited on faith—faith measured the active resources of God on the occasion.’” (*Constable's Notes*).

and you and your sons can live on the rest” (ESV). This matches Elijah's similar experience (1 Kings 17:8-16).

The widow was under tremendous financial stress, and adding to the pressure was the threat of a creditor to indenture her sons for the debts. Solomon observed: *“The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender”* (Prov. 22:7). How could she break free of that bondage? Elisha's handling of the matter involved supernatural aid, but the principles at work still apply today:

TAKE INVENTORY

Without doubt the Lord could have instantaneously provided a solution, yet Elisha follows a principle that is observed throughout Scripture: God's law of parsimony. He will only do for us what we are incapable of accomplishing ourselves. Examples are when Jesus asked the bystanders to roll away the stone sealing Lazarus' tomb as Jesus miraculously raised him from the dead (John 11:39); and when Jesus asked what food was available, then took meager items and fed thousands (Matt. 14:13-21). The Lord's provision begins with what we already have.

SHARPEN YOUR AXE

Elisha advises her to find more empty jars from neighbors - not money or oil; but jars. This is the equivalent of improving and refining our skills or resources. The outcome is still with God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-7 and Luke 12:13-21).

TRUST THE LORD

Throughout, this is about imploring the Lord to bless our efforts with His greater providence (Col. 3:17).