

STORY 4: MERCY

During the days when Ahab was king of Israel, many people turned away from the God of Israel and worship the false gods. Elijah the prophet of God said there would be no rain in the land for the next few years except at his command. This was God's judgment upon the people for abandoning their God. For a time Elijah hid in a cave near a small stream where each day the Lord sent ravens to feed him. After some time, the stream dried up because there was no rain. Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go at once to Zarephath and stay there. I have told a widow there to give you food."

When Elijah came to the town gate, a widow (who was not an Israelite) was there gathering sticks for a fire. He asked, "Would you bring me a cup of water?" And as she was going to get it, he asked, "Would you also please bring me a piece of bread?"

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread. All I have is a handful of flour and a little olive oil. I'm on my way home now with these few sticks to cook what I have for my son and me. After that, we will starve to death."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do what you said. But first, please make a small piece of bread and bring it to me. The Lord has promised that your jar of flour won't run out and your bottle of oil won't dry up before he sends rain for the crops."

She went away and did exactly what Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. The flour and oil never ran out.

Sometime later the son of the woman got sick. He kept getting worse, and finally, he died. The woman said to Elijah, "What have I done to you? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

"Bring me your son," Elijah replied. He took him to an upstairs room where he was staying and laid him on his bed. Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, "O Lord, why have you brought this tragedy upon this widow I am staying with, causing her son to die?" Then the prophet stretched himself over the boy three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord, my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy started breathing again. Elijah carried the boy down to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that you really do speak for the Lord."