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# In the Times of Elijah and Elisha: The Universal Mission of God in the Narratives of the Sidonian Widow and Naaman the Aramean<sup>1</sup>

Sarita D. Gallagher

## Introduction

*“I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” —Jesus (Luke 4:25-27<sup>1</sup>)*

Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus rose to speak to the Sabbath crowd gathered in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-22). Reading from the messianic prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus’ concluded: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21). Jesus’ bold statement was met with whispers of amazement and admiration from the gathered audience. Now, just minutes later, the situation had changed. The widespread approval had transformed into a tangible hatred. The tension among the congregation rose to such a murderous height that the incited men grabbed the young rabbi with the intent to kill. What had led to this transformation? What had ignited the fierce anger of the audience? The author implies that it was two stories: that of Elijah and the Sidonian widow (1 Kings 17:8-24) and Elisha and the Aramean general Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-27). By including these two narratives, Jesus drew a parallel between Yahweh’s prophets bringing blessing and healing to the pagans of old, with himself, the promised Messiah, bringing God’s blessing to the Gentiles of the present era. Although Jesus’ message was met with violent disagreement, his implications about God were accurate. God did send the prophet Elijah into enemy territory (1 Kings 17:8-24), and He did heal the Aramean

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commander Namaan through the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-27). Despite the negative reaction of the Jews in Nazareth, God is what they feared—God “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). The blessings of God do fall upon the righteous and unrighteous alike.

In twenty-first century Christianity it is easy to read this interchange between Jesus and the hostile Nazarene crowd with a sense of comfort. As a contemporary non-Jewish believer I rejoice in the fact that Jesus spoke so publicly of God’s love for the Gentile community. Until recently, however, I never stopped to consider the deeper implications of Jesus’ words. What do these narratives imply about the mission of God and His interactions with the Gentile population now? A closer reading of the 1 and 2 Kings narratives reveals a God who works outside of his chosen people. Both narratives illustrate that: (1) God is present and active among the Gentile community, (2) Gentiles can have a real faith in God, and that (3) Gentiles can be both providers and receivers of God’s covenantal blessing. We only begin to comprehend the original discomfort and frustration of the Nazarene crowd when we change the first century term *Gentile* to the modern English equivalent—*non-Christian*. The revised missional implications now become: (1) God is present and active among *non-Christians*, (2) *Non-Christians* can have a real faith in God, and (3) *Non-Christians* can be both providers and receivers of God’s covenantal blessing. It is this last statement that most challenges our top-down model of ministry that has historically dominated our churches. In reflecting on these narratives, the questions must then be asked: What can we learn about God’s mission and blessing from these Old Testament narratives? And, what are the missional implications of this circular model of divine blessing for the contemporary Church today?

In this article, I explore the missional impact of God’s blessing in the Sidonian widow (1 Kings 17:8-24) and Namaan (2 Kings 5:1-27) narratives. While both narratives reveal that “God’s universal love reaches beyond the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, and even religious affiliation,”<sup>2</sup> these narratives are more than mere tales of God’s temporary love for the nations. Instead, as evidenced in the Nazarenes’ hostile response to Jesus, the Hebrew narratives suggest much more serious conclusions about the universal purposes, goals, and priorities of the Creator God. They additionally challenge our understanding of the *missio Dei* in the world today.

## Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath

In order to comprehend the role of God's blessing in the Sidonian widow narrative, it is important to first understand the historico-political environment in which the events took place. When the story of the widow of Zarephath begins, Elijah the Tishbite had just returned from hiding from King Ahab in Wadi Cherith (1 Kings 17:10). The sin and disobedience of King Ahab had led God to declare that neither dew nor rain would fall upon the land except by Elijah's word (v. 1). The whole land was therefore experiencing a severe drought and even the Wadi, where Elijah lived, had now dried up. It was at this point that God spoke to Elijah commanding him to go to Zarephath, a small village in Sidon, where Elijah would find a widow whom God had arranged to feed him (v. 9). In the midst of God's punishment of King Ahab of Israel—for marrying the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians and for worshipping false idols—God had commanded his prophet to go to the same pagan region, the birthplace of Jezebel and the center of Baal worship. Moreover, God declared that he had ordained one of the women of Zarephath to feed Elijah, the holy prophet of God (v. 9). Needless to say, in the introduction alone, the stage was set for the controversial story that follows.

Thirteen kilometers south of Sidon, the town of Zarephath sat along the Mediterranean coast just outside of the political borders of ancient Israel.<sup>3</sup> It was in this non-Israelite town that the prophet Elijah approached a local widow collecting sticks to prepare the final meal for herself and her family. The fact that the woman was “a Phoenician [and] presumably a worshiper of Baal”<sup>4</sup> would not have been lost upon the original audience. Neither would the author's inclusion that the woman was a widow and thus in one of the lowest socio-economic positions of society. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, “widows [were] typically associated with the neediest elements of society, the orphans and the poor”<sup>5</sup> primarily because they were unable to support themselves or their families financially and were thus dependent upon the generosity of others.<sup>6</sup> The devastating famine in the region would have therefore been a natural disaster that the widow of Zarephath would have had little power to overcome. However, as in the case of Hagar (Gen. 16:7–14), the biblical narrative records that God knew about the suffering of this foreign widow. Furthermore, it was this impoverished woman that God chose to be the vehicle of salvation for his prophet, and as we learn later, to be a recipient of His transformational blessing.

As God's representative to the Israelites, the prophet Elijah was known to speak and act according to God's will and command. Therefore when God directed the prophet into enemy territory, Elijah followed by faith, obeying God's every command. Gene Rice, in his commentary on 1 Kings, notes that "Elijah was not only a spokesperson of the word; he was himself a living word, proclaiming through his name and lifestyle his wholehearted and exclusive devotion to God."<sup>7</sup> The author adds that Elijah "so cultivated God's presence that he brought it near to others (1 Kings 17:18) and was capable of acting as an instrument of divine power (v. 22)."<sup>8</sup> Although the widow greeted Elijah respectfully with an oath in the name of Yahweh (v. 12)<sup>9</sup>, it was clear that the prophet was now interacting with a people who were not in a covenantal relationship with his God. As prophets were often called by God to bring judgment upon foreign kings and nations, the surprisingly salvific purposes of this particular visit to Sidon are noteworthy. As one considers Elijah's role as a representative and mouthpiece of the true and living God, the prophet's dialogue with the widow also becomes important. Elijah's presence in Zarephath represented the presence of God in the town, and the prophet's actions, mirrored the actions of God. It is thus through Elijah that God's compassion towards the Gentile family is visible.

### The Circular Blessing of God

A prevalent theme within the Sidonian widow narrative is the outworking of God's blessing in the lives of Elijah and the widow. In the book of Genesis, God's blessing was presented as a life-giving power that enabled individuals and communities to be fruitful and prosper in all elements of their lives.<sup>10</sup> The opening scenes of the Zarephath narrative stand in direct contrast to this state of blessedness and life. In fact, in the narrative, there were three consecutive events in which life was almost extinguished, not given. First, when Elijah initially encountered the widow, both the prophet and the Sidonian widow were facing starvation (1 Kings 17:7-12). While the prophet's water source had just recently dried up (v. 7), the widow was in the midst of preparing her last meal, after which she and her family faced certain death (v. 12). This life-and-death scenario was repeated in the narrative when the widow's son later dies (v. 17). In this second incident the untimely death of the widow's son is doubly traumatic as it precedes the eventual socio-economic demise of his mother. In the ancient Near East parents were dependent upon their sons who would become the primary breadwinners and providers of

financial security during their old age.<sup>11</sup> With the recent death of her son, the widow returned to a state of poverty and eminent death. In both the cases of Elijah and the Sidonian widow the threat of death was real and the absence of God's blessing clearly felt.

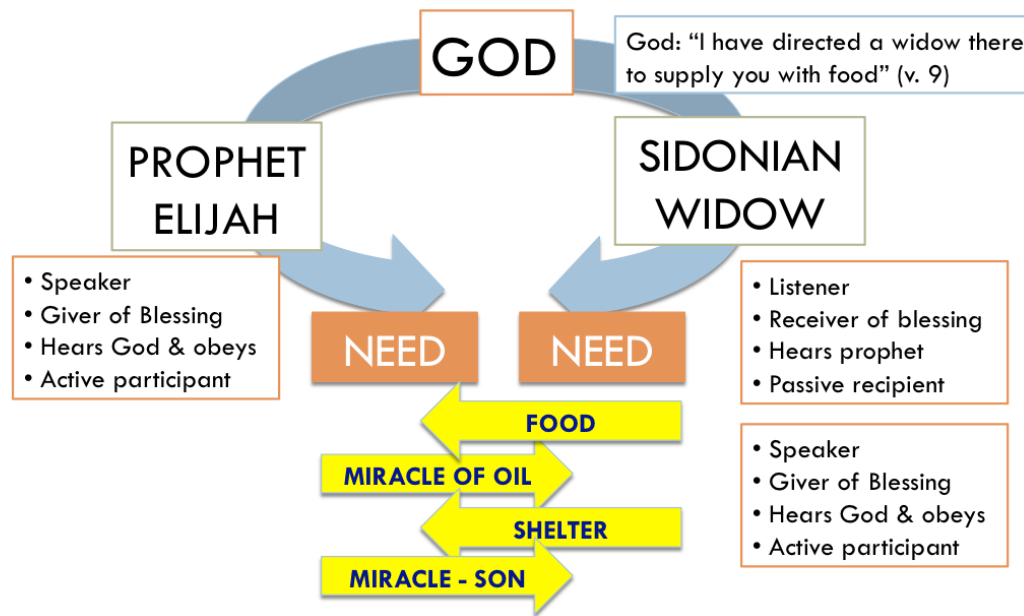
As the story unfolds, the threat of death was met with the abundant provision of God in the form of food, oil, shelter, and life. The first miracle that takes place was two-fold: Elijah was provided with a meal via the widow (1 Kings 17:13), and the widow was given a meal pot and oil pitcher that never ran dry via the prophet of God (v. 16). While the prophet was accustomed to the faithful protection of His God, the Sidonian widow was encountering God for the first time. In great obedience to Elijah's request for food and water, the widow took a step of faith in the midst of her plight to share her final meal with the unknown prophet (vv. 11-13). When she initially hesitated, God spoke through Elijah as he proclaimed: "For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth" (v. 14). The words of the Lord immediately came to pass as the widow's diminished ingredients became abundant and she never lacked food again (vv. 15-16). The magnitude of the miracle for the widow and her family cannot be underestimated. God's abundant provision for them saved them from certain death, renewing their lives daily. Echoes of the blessing of God upon creation in the book of Genesis are evident as God restored fruitfulness (Gen. 1:22, 28) and the abundance of food for the widow and her household (vv. 28-29).

In the second interchange, Elijah restored the widow's son to life, once again bringing the blessing of God upon the widow and her household (1 Kings 17:17-23). As mentioned previously, the death of a son was considered one of the worst possible scenarios for a widow. Coming from a holistic worldview, the widow may have considered the recent series of events, in particular the death of her son, as God's punishment on her for "some secret sin she had committed."<sup>12</sup> Tragedy in the midst of God's blessing appeared to have confused both the widow and the prophet, as Elijah diligently "intercede[d] on the boy's behalf."<sup>13</sup> Elijah called out to God and asked: "O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" (1 Kings 17:20). Stretching out his body upon the boy three times the prophet called out to God: "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him" (v. 21). God heard Elijah's prayer and returned life to the boy (v. 22). The widow's response to this life-giving miracle was not "profuse expressions of gratitude" but "instead...a profound profession of faith in Elijah and the word he bears."<sup>14</sup> After witnessing the miraculous blessings of God, the widow

acknowledged: “Elisha’s deity, the God of Israel, is truly the Lord of life, for even one who has already died could be brought to life again by that deity’s power.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the blessing of God not only brought abundant life back to the widow and her household, but also led the widow to a powerful revelation that Yahweh was both living and active in the world.

A circular pattern of blessing is present between God’s prophet Elijah and the Sidonian widow. This circular distribution of divine provision is evident as God ordained Elijah to bless the Sidonian widow, and the foreign widow to bless the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:8-24).<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that God’s provision and blessing was not delivered exclusively through God’s chosen representative, Elijah. In the narrative the author emphasizes that both the prophet and the widow were in desperate need of God’s help (vv. 2-12). The extent of Elijah’s dependence upon God was highlighted in God’s recent provision of all Elijah’s basic needs: guidance and security (vv. 2-3), fresh water from the brook (v. 4), and bread and meat (vv. 4-6). The first miracle in the narrative was therefore God’s provision of food and water for Elijah through the meager provisions of the widow (vv. 10-13). The second miracle, the abundant refilling of the widow’s jars of flour and oil, came afterward through the prophetic declaration of Elijah (vv. 14-16). This pattern of reciprocal blessing is repeated when the Sidonian widow provided housing for the prophet (v. 20), who in turn interceded on the widow’s behalf when her son was tragically killed (vv. 17-23). In each cycle of blessing, the prophet Elijah and the widow were both recipients and distributors of God’s provision.

## CIRCULAR BLESSING IN 1 KINGS 17:8-24



The interdependence of this distribution of God’s blessing highlights the universal focus of God, whose love and concern abound to all His creation. God’s omnipotence outside of the boundaries of Israel is also revealed, identifying God not only as the God of Israel, but the God of all nations.<sup>17</sup> The sovereignty of God over nature and humanity, the heavens and the earth, and Israel and the nations, is imprinted in the narrative and reinforced with the circular distribution of blessing in which God doesn’t distinguish between Yahwist and non-Yahwist. Simon J. DeVries explains that the widow’s faith was itself a gift from God that was granted to her during her plight. He notes:

The marvel is that God gave her faith sufficient to believe his assurance and his prophecy – but the God who can direct ravens to bring food in a desolate wadi can surely create faith in this widow’s heart. To the miracle of faith Yahweh adds the miracle of a never-empty jar of meal and a never-failing cruse of oil.<sup>18</sup>

Although the exact source of the widow’s faith cannot be determined, it is evident that the widow showed tremendous trust in God as she risked her family’s lives on the basis of a stranger’s promise. The seriousness of her situation was presented very clearly in the text, and it can be deduced that the widow and her family had long felt the pangs of hunger and desperation by the time she met Elijah. However, despite her dismal situation, Elijah challenged the widow’s



faith asking her to give the little that she had away.<sup>19</sup> The widow rose to the challenge and invited the prophet into her house and in doing so simultaneously invited in the blessing of God. The widow was greatly rewarded for her faith. The blessing that she needed most was bestowed upon her illustrating that “in contrast to the manipulative sexual rites of Canaanite religion, the word of God, when accepted in faith, is able to supply one’s needs even under the most adverse conditions.”<sup>20</sup> The widow of Zarephath was thus not only presented as a vehicle of God’s blessing, but also as a model of faith for the Hebrew people as she accepted the word of the Lord even before she had encountered the Living God.

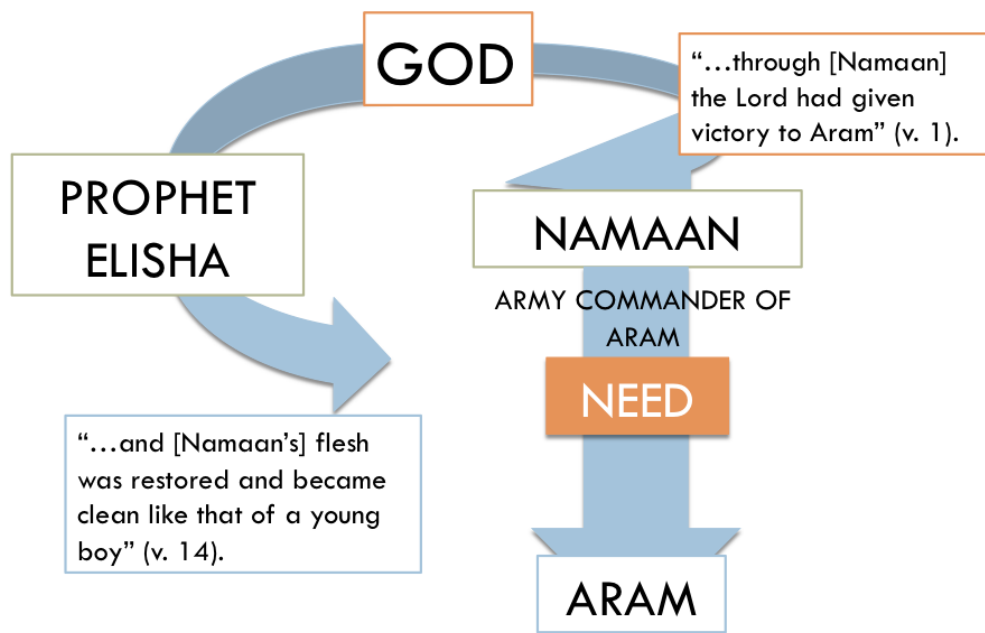
### Elijah and Naaman the Aramean<sup>21</sup>

The prophet Elisha’s encounter with Naaman the Aramean (2 Kings 5:1–27) is another example of God’s extension of his loving-kindness towards and through a non-Israelite. The story opens with a reference to the long-standing feud between Israel and the nearby kingdom of Aram (v. 2); both of whom “fought chiefly over possession of the disputed territories in northern Transjordan.”<sup>22</sup> As in the case of the region of Sidon, the kingdom of Aram was known to be an idolatrous nation in addition to being a long-standing enemy of Israel. Yet, in the beginning of the narrative, the author notes that: “through [Naaman] the LORD had given victory to Aram (v. 1).”<sup>23</sup> While Naaman only later became aware of the power of God (v.14), this introductory note indicates that God had long been involved in the wellbeing of the people of Aram. It is with this strange conflict of interests that the narrative begins, introducing the kingdom of Aram, one of Israel’s enemies, to Yahweh, Israel’s God.

While the Sidonian widow first encountered the blessing of God through the prophet Elijah, Naaman first heard of the power of God through the testimony of a young Israelite slave girl. Beneath even the status of a widow, the captive child was about as insignificant as you could be within the social strata of Aram. Yet, it was through the young girl’s witness to Naaman’s wife that Naaman first heard about Elisha, the prophet of God in Israel. It is not recorded in the text where the young girl learned the theological truth that her God could heal Israelites and Gentiles alike.<sup>24</sup> However, it was with boldness that the young Israelite declared that Naaman would be cured of leprosy “if only [her] master would see the prophet who is in Samaria” (2 Kings 5:3). T.R. Hobbs notes that “the Hebrew term introducing the girl’s

exclamation ‘*ylta*’: ‘I would that,’ which occurs only here and in Psalm 119:5, is analogous to *yrca*, ‘blessed is’...’<sup>25</sup> Thus, the state of “blessedness” to come to Namaan was foreshadowed even in this initial interaction. Once again the blessings of God were introduced by a most unlikely source, a female in a position of powerlessness in society, re-emphasizing that it was through the power and discretion of God that blessings come, not through the strength of humankind.

### GOD’S BLESSING IN 2 KINGS 5:1-27



As in the case of the Sidonian widow, Naaman received the restoration of his life through an act of obedience and faith (2 Kings 5:14). Although the skin disease which afflicted Naaman was most likely not Hansen’s disease, or leprosy as it is known today, it carried “with it a social stigma and [was] associated with death.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the complete physical healing of Naaman’s skin disease (v. 14) enabled him to return to his military duties and once again be accepted back into society. Namaan’s faith was not perfect however, as the sheer simplicity of Elisha’s instructions sent the veteran commander into a rage (vv. 10-12). It was only at the insistence of Namaan’s servants that he agreed to follow the prophet’s simple command to journey from Samaria up north to the Jordan river to wash seven times (vv. 10-13). The result of Namaan’s

obedience was profound; the author(s) state that Naaman's flesh "was restored and became clean like that of a young boy" (v. 14). This mention of Namaan's physical healing returning his appearance to that of a "young boy" is an allusion to the young Hebrew slave girl who originally led Namaan to Elisha (vv. 2–3). Now, Namaan joins the young girl as a witness of the great healing power of God.

One of the primary motifs within the Namaan narrative is the dramatic disparity of faith between the main protagonists. The narrative is bookended with striking comparisons of faith: (1) the faith of the Israelite slave girl in contrast with the dismal faith of the King of Israel (2 Kings 5:2–8), and (2) the faith of Namaan, the Aramean military officer, in contrast with the faithlessness of Gehazi, the servant of the prophet Elisha (vv. 15–27). In both vignettes it is consistently the least likely individual, the young Hebrew captive and the pagan general, who exhibit active faith and obedience to Yahweh. Choon–Leong Seow writes: "Ironically, the king of Israel does not seem to know what the captive slave girl in Damascus knows: that there is a prophet in Samaria who could perform the miracle. He sees only the impossibility of the case; she sees its possibility."<sup>27</sup> In the Naaman narrative, the lack of faith of Gehazi led to dire consequences: as "the Gentile Naaman was restored, while the Israelite Gehazi was cursed."<sup>28</sup> In both accounts the poignant reality is enforced; that true faith in God is not an automatic consequence of the religious elite or the politically powerful. Instead, faith in God can be expressed by the powerful and powerless alike, and by those among the people of God, and those who have just encountered God.

The result of Namaan's healing was the Aramean officer's acknowledgement of Yahweh as the one and only living God. Upon his physical restoration, Naaman proclaimed: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). In order to fulfill his oath to "never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord" (v. 17), Naaman made arrangements to transport soil from Israel to Aram in order to worship the God of Israel. Although perhaps exhibiting an "unsophisticated" theology<sup>29</sup> in this removal of Israelite soil, Naaman showed his dedication to worshipping Yahweh outside the borders of Israel through a traditional method of the time.<sup>30</sup> Naaman, in fact, became a proselyte of Yahweh<sup>31</sup> denying all other gods and embracing monotheism.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the words of the prophet Isaiah came to fruition in this passage: "The Sovereign Lord declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: 'I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered'" (Isa. 56:8).

## Missional Implications

In the narratives of the Sidonian widow (1 Kings 17:8–16) and Namaan (2 Kings 5:1-27) the outcome of the stories is surprising. The Hebrew slave girl turned out to be the faithful witness of God, not the King of Israel; Namaan, the pagan military commander of Aram, turned out to be the man of honor, not Gehazi, Elisha's servant. Everything that the original Jewish audience thought to be important—the practice of Judaism, positions of prestige and power, high social status, financial stability, and being of a respectable age and gender—were swept aside by God in these narratives. The heroes of faith in the stories varied in age, social status, gender, and religion. There was only one characteristic the protagonists all shared—their desperate need for God. It was this urgent need for God's intervention that led Elijah to enter non-Israelite territory (1 Kings 17:1-9), the Sidonian widow to give away her last meal to a stranger (vv. 13-15), and Namaan to listen to his servants and wash in the Jordan river (2 Kings 5:13-14). In the Hebrew accounts God responded to each act of faith and obedience with an outpouring of his holistic blessing: food and shelter for the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:15-17; 19-20), food and financial security for the widow and her family (vv. 15-17), restoration of life for the widow's son (vv. 22-23), and physical healing for the commander Namaan (2 Kings 5:14). In both narratives the traditional Hebrew understanding of who was a follower of God, and who was not, was challenged and turned upside down.

While socio-cultural, political, and linguistic shifts have taken place since the first century, our expectations of God are still very similar to those of Jesus' original Nazarene audience (Luke 4:24–27). While we embrace the idea of God loving the nations, we expect that God will only operate within the ecclesiological lines of the established Christian Church. We further identify non-believers as those in need of God's blessing, never the distributors of God's blessing. However, as evident in these Hebrew narratives, while God did use his prophets as major vessels of His blessing, God also directly blessed Namaan and the nation of Aram (2 Kings 5:1), and used the foreign widow to bless His prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:13-16; 20; 22). Instead of perpetuating the idea that God's blessing only flowed through His people, these narratives present examples of God directly blessing Gentiles. In addition, a circular movement of blessing is evident in the narrative of the Sidonian widow as God blesses the prophet who

blesses the widow, and visa-versa. Each accounts points to a God who was not restricted by political or religious boundaries; and, whose loving-kindness was not limited to one people group, but, instead, encompassed His entire creation.

As we reflect upon the universal blessing of God in these narratives, there are several missional implications that emerge for the contemporary Church. Of particular relevance to Christian believers is the knowledge that: (1) we are all in need of God's presence, provision, and blessing, (2) God is active in the lives of believers and non-believers alike, (3) blessing originates from God, not the Church, (4) God is not the exclusive property of the Church, and (5) believers and non-believers mutually encounter God in ministry situations. First, as is evident in both the Sidonian widow and Namaan narratives, every human being is in need of God's loving-kindness, guidance, encouragement, provision, and wisdom. It is in accepting our shared need of God with all of humanity that we begin to understand God's sovereignty over all the peoples and nations of the world. Second, God is actively drawing people to himself, both inside and outside of traditional Christian communities. One of the notable parallels between both narratives was the missional outcome of each encounter. Upon receiving back her resurrected son, the widow of Zarephath declared: "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth" (v. 24). Similarly, when Namaan was healed of his skin condition he proclaimed: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel..." (2 Kings 5:15). In witnessing the power of God, both Gentiles were drawn to God, and acknowledged His sovereignty over all the nations of the world.

Another missional implication of the Hebrew narratives is the knowledge that God is not the exclusive property of the Church. It is God who determines to whom He speaks, gives dreams, blesses, and draws to Himself. While the global Church may join Christ in this process, it is the Spirit of God that guides the Church, not the Church that guides God. In the same way, the transformational blessing of God is God's to give. As Elijah realized when he prayed over the widow's deceased son, the transformative power of God comes from God alone (1 Kings 17:19-22). Lastly, ministry is rarely one-sided. Mission involves both believer and non-believer alike encountering the presence of the Living God. In the narrative of Elijah and the Sidonian widow we see two individuals who needed the intervention of God in their lives, not one. God saw both of their needs, and accordingly provided for each of them independently, and through one another.

The missional implications of the Sidonian widow and Namaan narratives require a paradigm shift in how the global Church approaches cross-cultural ministry. While we may understand that blessing comes from God, we often believe that God can only bless the nations through us, his Church. Biblical examples, such as that of the Sidonian widow, who was used by God to bless the prophet Elijah, are not well represented within our ministry paradigms. Neither is the reality that God is working outside of His people, blessing individuals such as Namaan, and nations such as Aram. While not dismissing the truth that God works through His people, it is also crucial to embrace the reality that God also works outside of the Church. As represented in the 1 and 2 Kings narratives, God independently draws individuals to Himself often resulting in missional encounters (1 Kings 17:24; 2 Kings 5:15).

### Conclusion

Referenced in Jesus' speech to the Nazarenes (Luke 4:24–27), the stories of the Sidonian widow and Naaman the Aramean reveal that God's blessing extends to both those inside and outside of the people of Israel. Kaiser writes:

Only one explanation will satisfy all the data: the divine revelation wanted us to see that Yahweh was truly calling all the families of the earth—even one's enemies—to the same Savior and salvation. Nothing could force God to bestow his gifts of grace or mercy, not even those of royalty or position. But then, neither could ethnicity detract from his plan to spread his grace far and wide.<sup>33</sup>

As such, it is not surprising that Jesus would later allude to these narratives “to justify the inclusivity of his ministry (v. 27). [For] just as Elijah ministered to the Phoenician widow of Zarephath and just as Elisha ministered to Naaman the Aramean, so, too, Jesus proclaimed good news to the outcasts of Jewish society as well as to some Gentiles.”<sup>34</sup> Acknowledging the “universalism embedded in the narrative,”<sup>35</sup> the missional heart of God the Father is revealed in both the Sidonian widow and Namaan narratives, as God reached out with His hand of blessing to the nations surrounding Israel. Additionally, the missional implications of these accounts for the contemporary Church today include the fact that God is still actively drawing people to Himself. Just as God saw the suffering of the Sidonian widow, and had compassion upon the Aramean military commander, so God continues to see the suffering and longing of those inside, and currently outside, of His Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

<sup>2</sup> Choon-Leong Seow, *1 & 2 Kings*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 3, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 130.

<sup>3</sup> Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 432.

<sup>4</sup> Seow, *1 & 2 Kings*, 128.

<sup>5</sup> Cogan, *1 Kings*, 128.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>7</sup> Gene Rice, *1 Kings: Nations under God*, eds. George A.F. Knight and Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, *International Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 145.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>9</sup> Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings*, ed. David W. Cotter, *BERIT OLAM: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 229.

<sup>10</sup> See Genesis 1:21-22, 27, 29; 9:1-7; 13:16; 15:4b-5; 16:10b; 17:2b, 4b; 17:5b-6; 17:16b, 16d; 17:19a; 17:20b; 18:18a; 22:17b-c; 24:60b; 26:4a; 26:24c; 28:3b; 28:14a; 35:11; 46:3; 47:27b; 48:16b; 49:22.

<sup>11</sup> John Goldingay, *Israel's Faith, Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 456.

<sup>12</sup> Rice, *1 Kings*, 145-146.

<sup>13</sup> Seow, *1 & 2 Kings*, 129.

<sup>14</sup> Walsh, *1 Kings*, 232.

<sup>15</sup> Seow, *1 & 2 Kings*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, trans. Anselm Hagedorn, *Continental Commentaries*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 183.

<sup>17</sup> Cogan, *1 Kings*, 432.

<sup>18</sup> Simon John DeVries, *1 Kings*, vol. 12, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 218.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>20</sup> Rice, *1 Kings*, 143.

<sup>21</sup> The ancient kingdom of Aram is located in the present-day region of the Syrian Arab Republic.

<sup>22</sup> Robert C. Dentan, *The First and Second Books of the Kings*, ed. Balmer H. Kelly, vol. 7, *The Layman's Bible Commentary* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), 80-81.

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<sup>23</sup> In Seow's commentary on I and II Kings, the author notes that "in Israelite theology no foreign army can be victorious over Israel unless it is by the will of the Lord" (193). He continues that the inclusion of this fact is consistent with the understanding that any defeat of Israel was the will of God and would in the end bring about the greatest good for Israel as can be seen with the eventual conversion of the prominent Gentile military commander in I Kings 5:15-18 (193). Also see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 43.

<sup>24</sup> Kaiser, 44.

<sup>25</sup> T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 13, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 57.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>27</sup> Seow, *1 & 2 Kings*, 193.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 260-261.

<sup>31</sup> Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *2 Kings*, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 67.

<sup>32</sup> Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 260.

<sup>33</sup> Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 50.

<sup>34</sup> Seow, *1 & 2 Kings*, 197.

<sup>35</sup> Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 69.