

1 Kings 17 - Elijah's Announcement of God's Judgment; Widow at Zarephath

II. The divided kingdom from the North-South division until the Assyrian invasion (1 Kings 12:1—2 Kings 17:41)

(12) Israel during Elijah's Ministry (1 Kings 17:1—2 Kings 1:18)

(A) The Lord's supremacy over Baal (1 Kings 17:1—18:46)

(a) The Lord withholds rain (17:1-7)

(b) The Lord is the giver of grain and oil (17:8-16)

(c) The Lord is the giver of life (17:17-24)

1 Kings 17

(12) Israel during Elijah's Ministry (1 Kings 17:1—2 Kings 1:18)

(A) The Lord's supremacy over Baal (1 Kings 17:1—18:46)

(a) The Lord withholds rain (17:1-7)

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall certainly be neither dew nor rain *during these years*, except by my word."

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1 Elijah the foreigner, who was an alien resident from Gilead, told Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, in whose presence I'm standing, there will be neither dew nor rain these next several years, except when I say so."

1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

- Elijah announced that discipline was about to fall upon Ahab and Jezebel in particular, and upon the land of Israel in the form of drought

— Ahab's apostasy had been going on for 14 years before God confronted the king with His prophetic challenge; God always gives sinners an opportunity to judge themselves and repent before He sends judgment on them (Cf. 1 Cor 11:31; 2 Peter 3:9-10).

- "...these years" - an unspecified period of time here, but confirmed as three-and-a-half years in the NT (Luke 4:25; James 5:17)

Elijah walked into the court of Ahab and Jezebel and gave them the latest weather report. He said it was not going to rain except by his word—and he was leaving town—he had no intention of giving the word. Then he walked out of the court just as dramatically as he had walked in.

Elijah

You get the impression that Elijah was a rugged individual, and he was. But there's something else that should be said here about him—God had to train this man. God has always had a method of training the men He uses by taking them to the desert. You will recall that that is where He trained Moses. God took Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and placed him in a land with rugged terrain. God did the same for John the Baptist, and the apostle Paul spent at least two full years out in the Arabian desert.

Elijah had been and was being prepared by the Lord to demonstrate to all Israel that Yahweh, not Baal, is still the only true God. Even Elijah's name means "Yahweh is my God." Elijah lived in Gilead east of the Jordan River near a community called Tishbe. Perhaps as Elijah heard reports of Jezebel's increasing maneuverings to replace the worship of the Lord with Baal worship his godly heart was stirred up. God gave him a mission. Armed with God's promise, he walked westward to Samaria. Bursting into the palace, he hurled his ultimatum at King Ahab. He claimed that the LORD is the God of Israel, that He is alive (Cf. v12; 18:10), and that he, Elijah, was God's servant.

Elijah could confidently declare that there would be neither dew nor rain because God had promised to withhold these from the land if His people turned from Him to other gods (Lev 26:18-19; Deut 11:16-17; 28:23-24). God had apparently revealed to Elijah that He would honor that promise in Elijah's day. This would have struck at the heart of Baalism, for Baal-worshippers believed that their god was the god of rain! The drought, brought on by the true God showed that He, not Baal, controls the weather.

- 2 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,
- 2 The word of the LORD came to him, saying,
- 2 Later, this message came to him from the LORD:
- 2 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

3 "Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

3 "Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

3 "Leave here and go into hiding at the Wadi Cherith, where it enters the Jordan River.

3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

- That is, eastward from Samaria, toward the Jordan

— The brook Cherith is one of several brooks that empty into the Jordan. Though its exact identification is unknown, tradition locates it at Wadi el Kelt.

— This location constituted a suitable hiding place from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel

— While there, God provided for his needs, hid him from Ahab, and taught him a lesson (Cf. 18:10)

4 And it shall be that you will drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide food for you there."

4 It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there."

4 You will be able to drink from that brook, and I've commanded some crows to sustain you there."

4 And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

- Ravens do not even feed their own young (Cf. Job 38:41); God used this miracle to build Elijah's faith in view of the conflicts that he would later face

5 So he went and did *everything* according to the word of the LORD, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

5 So Elijah left and did exactly what the LORD had told him to do—he went to live near the Wadi Cherith, where it enters the Jordan River.

5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

6 And the ravens brought him **bread** and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook.

6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook.

6 Crows would bring him bread and meat both in the morning and in the evening, and he would drink from the brook.

6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

- "...bread" - *lehem*, means food in general, possibly including berries, fruit, nuts, eggs, etc.

— Perhaps they were brought from a distance where the drought had not yet affected the vegetation

7 But it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

7 It happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

7 But after a while, the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

7 And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

- The drought soon began to grip the nation...

God Prepares Elijah for Ministry

God had a very unusual ministry for Elijah to perform in which he would stand alone against hundreds of opponents (18:16-40). This section of the story reveals how the LORD prepared him for it.

(b) The Lord is the giver of grain and oil (17:8-16)

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

8 Then this message came to him from the LORD:

8 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

9 "Arise, go to **Zarephath**, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide food for you."

9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

9 "Get up, move to Zarephath in Sidon, and stay there. Look! I've commanded a widow to sustain you there."

9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

- "...Zarephath" - *Sarepta* [LXX], a town on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, the homeland of Jezebel (Cf. 16:31) and the heart of Baal-Melqart territory (Zarephath was 80-90 miles from Brook Cherith)

— God told Elijah that a widow would feed him (Cf. Luke 4:25-26). Going to a widow for food was a strange directive: widows were usually poor people; normally they ran out of food first in a famine. This famine had been created by the drought.

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the entrance of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a cup, so that I may drink."

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink."

10 So he got up and went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance to the city, a widow was there gathering sticks. So he asked her, "Please, may I have some water in a cup so I can have a drink?"

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

11 As she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand."

11 As she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand."

11 While she was on her way to get the water, he called out to her, "Would you please also bring me a piece of bread while you're at it?"

11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

12 But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no food, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks so that I may go in and prepare it for me and my son, so that we may eat it and die."

12 But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

12 "As the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have so much as a muffin, just a handful of flour in a bowl and some oil left in a bottle. Now I'm going to find some sticks so I can cook a last meal for my son and for me. Then we're going to eat it and die."

12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

The Widow

She recognized Elijah as an Israelite and at the same time she invited a divine curse upon herself if the words she was about to utter were not true, i.e., that she and her son were

about to eat their last meal. Here was a Gentile woman in Phoenicia who believed in the Lord; she said she believed He is alive ("As the Lord thy God liveth"; Cf. v1; 18:10).

13 However, Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said. Just make me a little bread loaf from it first and bring *it* out to me, and afterward you may make *one* for yourself and for your son.

13 Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring *it* out to me, and afterward you may make *one* for yourself and for your son.

13 But Elijah told her, "You can stop being afraid. Go and do what you said, but first make me a muffin and bring it to me. Then make a meal for yourself and for your son,

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

- Elijah asked the widow to put God's interests—represented by himself, a prophet of Yahweh—before her own interests as the condition for her blessing (Cf. Matt 6:33; Mark 12:41-44)

14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'The bowl of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil become empty, until the day that the LORD provides rain on the face of the earth.'

14 For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the face of the earth.'

14 because this is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'That jar of flour will not run out, nor will that bottle of oil become empty until the very day that the LORD sends rain on the surface of the ground.'

14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

- She responded obediently to the word Elijah gave her from God, showing she believed that Yahweh, not Baal, was the God who could provide food

— Then he gave her a promise on the authority of the word of God: she would have food until the drought ended

15 So she went and did *everything* in accordance with the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for *many* days.

15 So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for *many* days.

15 So she went out and did precisely what Elijah told her to do. As a result, Elijah, the widow, and her son were fed for days.

15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

- God honored her faith and provided her need for food

16 The bowl of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil become empty, in accordance with the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.

16 The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.

16 The jar of flour never ran out and the bottle of oil never became empty, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.

16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

- Her obedient response demonstrated her faith in the word of the LORD

- The Lord honored her faith by fulfilling His promise miraculously

— This miracle of God's continually supplying flour and olive oil was another polemic (protest) against Baal, just as was the drought

— Baal-worshippers believed he was a fertility god, giving rain to make crops grow, but he could not overcome the drought to make wheat and olive trees grow.

- Only the true God could provide flour and oil in a drought!

— This situation undoubtedly strengthened Elijah's faith in God's power and faithfulness, as well as the faith of the woman

(c) The Lord is the giver of life (17:17-24)

17 Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his condition became very grave, until *at the end* he was no longer breathing.

17 Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.

17 Sometime later, the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. In fact, his illness became so severe that he died.

17 And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.

- The sickness of the widow's son corresponded to Israel's spiritual condition at this time

18 So she said to Elijah, "Why is my *business any of yours*, you man of God? Yet you have come to me to bring my wrongdoing to remembrance, and to put my son to death!"

18 So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!"

18 "What do we have in common, you man of God?" she accused Elijah. "You came to me so you could uncover my guilt! And you're responsible for the death of my son!"

18 And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

- Some time later (Cf. v7)—again the exact time is not given—tragedy befell Elijah's hostess. The woman who owned the house was the widow.

— Her young son fell ill and finally stopped breathing; v18,20,22-23 make it clear that he had actually died

— The woman had a guilty conscience and immediately concluded that God was punishing her for her sin by killing her son. This is a common reaction among many people who do not know God's ways when personal tragedy enters their lives (Cf. John 9:2-3). What sin she was referring to is not stated.

19 But he said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her arms and carried him up to the upstairs room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed.

19 He said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed.

19 "Give me your son," he replied. Then he took him from her lap, carried him upstairs to the room where he lived, and laid him on his bed.

19 And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

- The boy was small enough to be carried in his mother's arms. Many homes in Palestine at that time had guest rooms built on their roofs.

20 And he called to the LORD and said, "LORD, my God, have You also brought catastrophe upon the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?"

20 He called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?"

20 Then he called out to the LORD and asked him, "LORD my God, have you also brought evil to this dear widow with whom I am living as her guest? Have you caused the death of her son?"

20 And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

- Elijah's first prayer simply expressed his compassion for the woman who, in addition to the trials of the famine, now also had to bear this tragedy

- Implicit in the prayer was the desire that God relieve her of this added burden

21 Then he stretched himself out over the boy three times, and called to the LORD and said, "LORD, my God, please, let this boy's life return to him."

21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him."

21 Then he stretched himself three times and cried out to the LORD, "LORD my God, please cause the soul of this little boy to return to him."

21 And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

- Often in cases of miraculous restoration and healing, God's servant placed his hand on the afflicted one to indicate that the power of God in him was passing to the needy individual (Cf. Matt 8:3)

— In this instance Elijah, out of heartfelt concern, stretched himself out placing the whole body of the lad in contact with his own. Three times Elijah did this, praying each time that God would restore the boy's life.

— Persistence in prayer is a fundamental requisite for obtaining one's petitions (Cf. Matt 7:7-8; Luke 11:5-13). It proved effective in this case.

— Elijah prayed shamelessly, one of the fundamental requisites for obtaining one's petitions in difficult cases (v21; Cf. Matt 7:7-8; Luke 11:5-13)

22 And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah, and the life of the boy returned to him and he revived.

22 The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived.

22 The LORD listened to Elijah, and the soul of the little boy returned to him, and he revived.

22 And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

- God miraculously restored the boy's life. This is the first recorded instance in Scripture of restoration to life of one who had died.

23 Elijah then took the boy and brought him down from the upstairs room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive."

23 Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive."

23 Then Elijah took the little boy downstairs from the upper chamber back into the main house and delivered him to his mother. "Look," Elijah told her, "your son is alive."

23 And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

- If God could raise a dead Gentile boy back to life in response to believing prayer, He could also revive the chosen people of Israel who had become spiritually dead

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

24 The woman responded to Elijah, "Now at last I've really learned that you are a man of God and that what you have to say about the LORD is the truth."

24 And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

- The best proof of the effectiveness of Elijah's preparation is that he was verified as an authentic man of God and the bearer of God's Word by a daughter of the very people he opposed

— This miracle proved to the woman that Elijah was indeed a man of God and that the word of the LORD that Elijah claimed to speak was indeed the truth.

— The fact that this was done to a Gentile is a key theme in Jesus' sermon at Capernaum, for which they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:26-29)

— The whole point of the story is to demonstrate that Yahweh, not Baal, has the power of life over death

This situation undoubtedly strengthened Elijah's faith in God's power and faithfulness, as well as the faith of the woman.