

1 Kings Chapter 17

1 Kings 17:1 " 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”: A new prophet enters the story and he will live up to his name, “Yahweh Is My God.” The Canaanites believed that Baal controlled the rain, so they understood Elijah to be declaring that his God had power over theirs (Deut. 28:12; 33:28). By this time there had been no “dew” or “rain” for six months. In Israel’s agricultural economy, this meant famine, followed by pestilence, then death.

The prophet Elijah’s ministry corresponded to his name: He was sent by God to confront Baalism and to declare to Israel the Lord was God and there was no other.

Elijah was a mighty prophet of God during the reigns of Ahab and Ahaziah in the northern kingdom of Israel (873-852 B.C.). Elijah shaped the history of his times and dominated Hebrew thinking for centuries afterward. His prophecies emphasized the unconditional loyalty to God required of the nation of Israel. His strange dress and appearance (2 Kings 1:8), his fleetness of foot (19:8), and his cave-dwelling habits (verse 3; 19:9), all suggest a robust, outdoor-type personality

Elijah appears as the protagonist in four stories in the books of Kings. In the first story (16:29-19:18), Elijah declares a drought to punish the nation for its idolatry. The second story (chapter 21), tells about the judicial murder of Naboth. Elijah confronts Ahab with a terrible prophecy of doom. The third story relates another prophecy of doom against Ahaziah (in 2 Kings 1:2-2:17). The final episode relates how Elisha became Elijah’s servant (19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-18). In later Jewish thought, the messianic age was frequently associated with Elijah’s return. Malachi speaks of the reappearance of Elijah (Matt. 4:5-6), before the day of the Lord arrives. The New Testament identifies John the Baptist with Elijah (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17), and some even identified Jesus with Elijah (Matt. 16:14; Luke 9:8). Along with Moses, he appears with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (in Matt. 17:3; 1 Kings 17:1; 1 Kings Chapters 17-21; 2 Kings 1:1-2:15).

“Tishbite”: Elijah lived in a town call Tishbe, east of the Jordan River in the vicinity of the Jabbok River.

“Not be dew nor rain”: The autumn and spring rains and summer dew were necessities for the crops of Israel. The Lord had threatened to withhold these from the Land if His people turned from Him to serve other gods (Lev. 26:18-19, Deut. 11:16-17; 28:23-24). Elijah had prayed for the drought (James 5:17). The drought proved that Baal, the god of the rains and fertility, was impotent before the Lord.

In the last lesson, we saw the ten tribes of Israel fall into the worst idolatry and worship of false gods; they had ever been involved in. They had two of the evilest leaders the world had ever

known in Ahab and Jezebel. They now have 850 false prophets in the land. This terrible lapse from worshipping the True God calls for a prophet of great magnitude. This is the reason God sent Elijah. "Elijah" means "my God is Jehovah". The strangest thing about Elijah is that he just suddenly appears upon the scene with no lead in at all. There is really no record of a city in Gilead by the name of Tishbi, or Tishbe, which would have made him a Tishbite. It is not important where he was from. He is in front of Ahab with a very important prophecy. God will withhold the rain and dew, until Elijah says the drought is over. This would be a very dangerous statement to make to so wicked a king as Ahab.

Verses 2-5: Over and over again, the text says, "The word of the Lord came" to Elijah. Elijah's response here is typical: "So he went and did according to" that divine word (18:1-2). His obedience is what made him successful in his service. The way of faith is step-by-step obedience before the lord, as He instructs His servants obey one command, and then He gives another. Christians need not ask about tomorrow when today is before them.

1 Kings 17:2 "And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,"

"Saying": As follows.

1 Kings 17:3 "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that [is] before Jordan."

"Brook Cherith": Probably this was a seasonal brook that flowed during the rainy season but dried up when the weather turned hot. It was located east of the Jordan River.

Ahab did not immediately act on this statement that Elijah had made. The LORD speaks to Elijah, and tells him to get away from Ahab immediately for his own safety. He is to go eastward to Cherith, which was on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Ahab was probably at Samaria.

1 Kings 17:4 "And it shall be, [that] thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."

"The ravens": Of the accuracy of this rendering, which is that of almost all the ancient versions and of Josephus, there can be little doubt. The singularly prosaic interpretations, substituted for this striking and significant record of miracle by some ancient and modern writers (adopting slight variations of the Hebrew vowel points). Such as "Arabs," "merchants," "inhabitants of a city Orbi or the rock Oreb" seem to have arisen simply from a desire to get rid of what seemed a strange miracle, at the cost (be it observed), of substituting for it a gross improbability. For how can it be supposed that such regular sustenance by human hands of the persecuted prophet could have gone on in the face of the jealous vigilance of the king? But it is idle to seek to explain away one wonder in a life and an epoch teeming with miracles. It is notable, indeed, that the critical period of the great Baal apostasy, and of the struggle of Elijah and Elisha against it, is the second great epoch of recorded miracle in the Old Testament. The still more critical epoch of Moses and Joshua being the first. It is hardly less idle to determine that this or that miracle is so

improbable, as to introduce any difficulty of acceptance which does not apply to miracles in general.

The water would be plentiful here. God had miraculously provided food for Elijah. Just as he rained Manna from heaven for the Israelites, He sends food to Elijah miraculously. The ravens would be unlikely fowl to bring food to him, because of their greed. This would make it an even greater miracle.

Verses 5-6: God often isolates people for a time, and even puts them in humbling circumstances, to teach them faith and patience and to prepare them for service. Moses, Jacob, Abraham, David, Elijah, and Jesus all spent time in the wilderness before their ministries began in earnest. God strengthened Elijah's faith by providing food for him, but Elijah could not enjoy that provision unless he went where God told him. Like God's servants today, he had to obey God in a humbling, challenging situation to receive God's blessing.

1 Kings 17:5 "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."

Took his journey eastward, and hid himself in the place directed to.

"For he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith": That is before Jordan (see 1 Kings 17:3).

1 Kings 17:6 "And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook."

"Ravens brought": God's supernatural provision, much like the manna and quail during Israel's wilderness wanderings (Exodus 16:13-36).

Elijah had been obedient to the LORD. Because of his obedience, the LORD provides for his necessities. Twice a day, the Lord feeds Elijah. Some scholars believe it was men who brought the bread and flesh twice a day to Elijah. I, however, have no difficulty believing the LORD sent the ravens with the food. The food being brought by the ravens is no more miraculous than the withholding of the dew and the rain. When Elijah, or anyone else, puts the LORD first and is totally obedient to Him, God will provide their necessities.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

1 Kings 17:7 "And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land."

When the "brook" dries up is the true test of a person's faith. God wanted Elijah to trust in Him rather than in His provision.

The prophecy is coming true. The brook dries up from the drought. Elijah possibly was at the brook for an extended time. He would have to seek another supply of water.

Verses 8-10: Sometimes God uses unusual circumstances to test a person's faith. He told Elijah to go to an unlikely place, "Zarephath", the very center of Baal worship and the home of Queen Jezebel (16:31; 17:9). At an unlikely time, when the king of Israel (Ahab), was hunting him with the intent to kill him. Then the Lord sent him to an unlikely person, a poor Gentile "widow" from a Baal-worshipping nation. In addition to testing Elijah's faith, the circumstances provided an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power and His compassion to those outside of Israel (Luke 4:25-26).

1 Kings 17:8 "And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,"

As before, after he had been a year at the brook, and that was dried up.

"Saying": as follows.

1 Kings 17:9 "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which [belongeth] to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

"Zarephath": A town on the Mediterranean coast about 7 miles south of Sidon. Elijah was sent to live there, in a territory controlled by Ahab's father-in-law, Ethbaal. In this way, he showed the power of God in the very area where the impotent Baal was worshiped, as He provided miraculously for the widow in the famine (verses 10-16).

Zarephath was located somewhere between Tyre and Sidon. It is located on the seashore north of Tyre. A widow in this area would have been in destitute condition herself, especially because of the drought. She would need help, as well as Elijah.

Verses 10-16: When genuine faith is tested, it brings glory to God and works for the good of the believer (Luke 4:24-26; 1 Peter 1:7).

1 Kings 17:10 "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."

Which according to Bunting; was one hundred miles from the brook Cherith.

"And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks": Perhaps out of a hedge just without the city this shows her to be a poor woman, who had no other way of getting fuel but this, and no servant to fetch it for her. Bunting tells us that now

before the gate of the city there was a certain chapel; where they say Elias first spoke with the widow.

"And he called to her, and said, fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink": Being thirsty through travelling, and supposing this to be the woman he was directed to, made trial of her this way. Some render it, "in this vessel", which he had with him, and made use of at the brook Cherith.

God had placed the widow here, so Elijah could make immediate contact with her. The fact that she was gathering sticks showed that things were not very good with her. Probably as much as Elijah being helped by the woman, is the fact that God will help her through Elijah. Elijah requesting water from her for a drink opens the door to conversation with her.

1 Kings 17:11 "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."

For she made no difficulty of granting his request, but immediately set out to fetch him some water from the city, or some spring close by, or her own house. Being very ready to do a hospitable act to a stranger, and especially to a good man, and a prophet, as she might perceive by his habit he was wearing, as it seems by what follows.

"And said, bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand": To eat before he drank. This he said still further to try her whether she was the person that was to sustain him, as well as in order to lead on to more discourse with her.

He has probably realized who this widow is by this time. He asks for the bread, to make sure this is the widow the LORD had sent him to.

Verses 12-16: The widow's resources were too limited to meet the need in her own family. But Elijah asked her to act in faith, feeding him first, and when she put God first, He provided. People often worry about tomorrow's needs, but Elijah's experience reveals God's miraculous provision for each day. When the supplier is God, He has what a person needs; He does not run dry (Phil. 4:19).

1 Kings 17:12 "And she said, [As] the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a 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."

Which shows her to be a good woman, swearing by the living God, and him only, and that she took Elijah to be a good man, and a prophet of the Lord.

"I have not a cake": greater or less, not a morsel of bread in the house.

"But a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse": These separate and unmixed, and not made into a cake, and dressed as she intended to do with them.

"And, behold, I am gathering two sticks": Or a few, which would be sufficient to bake such a quantity as her meal and oil would make. She speaks by the figure "meiosis", which expresses less than what is meant, as Ben Melech observes.

"That I may go in and dress it for me, and my son, that we may eat it, and die": Having nothing more left, and no expectation of any elsewhere, and the famine strong in the land. So that she could look for nothing but death after this was eaten.

This is a woman who still believes in the LORD. She gives this away by her reply. She and her son have just enough food for one more meal, and then they would die from starvation.

1 Kings 17:13 "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."

That she and her son should die, it would not be the case.

"Go and do as thou hast said": Mix her meal and her oil, and make a cake thereof, and bake it.

"But make thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son": Which was not said from a selfish spirit of the prophet, but to try the faith of the woman. And besides, as Abarbinel observes, the prophet was not only hungry and thirsty through his journey, and so required to be served first, but it was for the sake of his sustenance, that the Lord would command a blessing on the meal and oil. Wherefore, if she dressed it for herself and her son first, there would have been none left for the divine blessing to descend upon.

Elijah is sure now, that this is the widow the LORD had sent him to. Notice, the first thing he says to her is, "fear not". He realizes at this point, that the LORD had sent him for two purposes. He would be safe with this poor widow, and God would miraculously feed Elijah, the widow, and her son. Even this meager amount she had was to first be a gift to the prophet, and then she can feed her son and herself.

1 Kings 17:14 "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."

Whom the prophet perceived she had knowledge of, and faith in.

"The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail": That is, the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruse.

"Until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth": Which was assuring her the rain would be sent, and that the Lord, who had the sole command of it, would send it. And that, until that

time it should be sent, she would have no lack of provisions, and therefore need not hesitate dressing for the prophet first.

If we are living for the LORD, He will provide for our needs, not our greed. God will replenish their food, each time they go to the barrel. He sent the Manna every day, except Sabbath, for 40 years to nearly million people. It would be no problem for Him to feed these three, who were faithful to Him. There will be no lack of food for them.

1 Kings 17:15 "And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat [many] days."

Made a cake for him first, and brought it to him, which showed great faith in the word of the Lord by him.

"And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days": A year at least, if not two years (see 1 Kings 17:7). The widow, the prophet, and her family, lived upon the meal and oil so long. We read but of one son, but she might have more.

We know of one son in her house. This could however, speak of her relatives and her close friends. She was obedient to the LORD who spoke through Elijah, and God blessed her greatly.

1 Kings 17:16 "[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."

There being a continual increase and supply of both, through the mighty power of God working a continued miracle. The same as the loaves and fishes were increased while the disciples were eating in (Matt. 14:19).

God's Word is true. He did just as He had spoken through Elijah. There was plenty of food to take care of their needs.

Verses 17-18: In the ancient Near East, suffering was often mistakenly considered to be solely the result of sin (Job 4:7-8; John 9:3).

1 Kings 17:17 "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."

Not only after the conversation that passed between the prophet, and the widow, but after they had lived together many days, a year or years, upon the miraculous provision made for them.

"That the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick": That is, the son of the widow woman in whose house the prophet dwelt. The Jews say this woman was the mother of Jonah, and that he was this son of hers.

"And his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him": It was a sickness unto death, it issued in it; for that he was really dead appears from all that follows.

The breath of life had left the young son of the widow. He was so sick, he had died.

1 Kings 17:18 "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?"

As if she should say, it would have been well for me if I had never seen thy face, or had any conversation with thee. This she said rashly, and in her passion and agony, being extremely affected with the death of her child, which made her forget and overlook all the benefits she had received through the prophet's being with her.

"Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" To punish her for her former sins, she was conscious she had been guilty of. For she supposed, that as it was by his prayer that the drought and famine were come upon the land, so it was in the same way that her son's death came, namely, through the prayer of the prophet.

She is afraid that the LORD had counted her keeping Elijah in her home a sin. Of course, this is not true. She had no personal relations with Elijah. She was helping him, because he was a man of God. She fears that sin in her life had taken the life of her child.

Verses 19-24: The Canaanites believed that Baal had to submit periodically to the god of death, Mot. But here, deep in Baal country, Yahweh demonstrated not only His power to sustain life in a time of drought but His power to overcome death. This is the first time in the Bible when a servant of God raises a dead person to life. But it will not be the last. Like Elijah, Jesus raised a widow's son from death, demonstrating that God had come to help His people (Luke 7:11-17).

1 Kings 17:19 "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."

"Loft": The "loft," an upper room or shelter on the roof, was reached from outside the house. Such accommodations often served as guest chambers (2 kings 4:10).

This son had to be very young for her to be able to carry him. The upper room was usually for guests, and was as good as the owner of the house had. The fact that he laid him upon the bed, shows the helplessness of the child. Elijah lay across him to listen for a heartbeat, and to pray for him.

1 Kings 17:20 "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?"

Or prayed unto him, as the Targum, with great vehemence and importunity.

"And said, O Lord, my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" He pleads his interest in the Lord, and makes use of it as an argument with him to hear his prayer. He observes the character and condition of the woman, a widow, such as the Lord has a compassionate regard for. And he urges the kindness of her to him, with whom he had sojourned so long. And seems to represent the case as an additional evil or affliction to him, as well as to the widow.

1 Kings 17:21 "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."

The full power of the thrice-holy "God" is invoked by Elijah on behalf of the dead lad (Num. 6:24-26; Isa. 6:3). For other cases of a similar healing of a dead child (compare 2 Kings 4:34, Luke 7:11-16; and Acts 20:10).

These two verses show that the child had been dead. The stretching himself upon the child three times, is speaking of a laying on of hands similar to anointing for healing. Three times shows the involvement in the fullness of the godhead in the miracle restoration of this child. Notice in the prayer that Elijah prayed, it is in the power of God to let the child live or not. This problem with the son is not to punish the widow, but to glorify God.

1 Kings 17:22 "And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived."

In prayer, and answered it.

"And the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived": This is the first instance of anyone being raised from the dead. This Satan has imitated; hence the many fabulous stories with the Heathens of persons being raised to life after death.

It is God alone who puts the soul in us.

Genesis 2:7 "And the LORD God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

1 Kings 17:23 "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."

"Thy son liveth": Canaanite myths claimed that Baal could revive the dead, but here it was the Lord, not Baal, who gave back the boy's life. This conclusively demonstrated that the Lord was the only true God and Elijah was His prophet (verse 24).

One of the beautiful messages about this miracle is the fact that he took him out of his mother's hands. The son was beyond human help. He laid him down as if offering his life to God. God brought the life back. We must all place ourselves in the hands of God, before we can experience new life. The son is miraculously alive and restored to his mother.

1 Kings 17:24 "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."

“A man of God” (see note on 12:22). A man of God has a true word from God (see the note on 1 Sam. 9:6-11).

This miracle left no doubt at all that this prophet, Elijah, is a man of God. The restoration of her son had brought new confidence in this widow. She had unselfishly given to this prophet a place to stay and food that God provided. Now, she is reassured she had done the right thing.

1 Kings Chapter 17 Questions

1. What is Elijah called in verse 1?
2. Who does he stand before and prophesy to?
3. What is his prophecy?
4. How many false prophets do Ahab and Jezebel have?
5. What does "Elijah" mean?
6. How long will God withhold the rain?
7. What did the Word of the LORD tell Elijah to do?
8. How will Elijah get food and water?
9. How often did the ravens bring Elijah food?
10. What type of food did they bring?
11. What happened to the brook of water?
12. Where did the LORD send Elijah for food?
13. What did Elijah ask of the widow?
14. What else did he ask her to bring to him?
15. How did she answer the second request?
16. How much food does the widow have?
17. Who would this miracle of God help?
18. What did Elijah tell her would happen, until it rained upon the earth again?

19. Who became sick?
20. What was the woman afraid of?
21. How do we know her son was young?
22. How many times did Elijah touch her son, as he prayed for him?
23. How do we know that he was dead?
24. What is a beautiful message in this for all of us?
25. What did the woman say to Elijah, when her son was restored to her?
26. What two things were revealed to her about Elijah?