

1 Kings 17:1-24

The Prophet Elijah

Elijah first appears in this chapter, but the timeline is not clear. No details of his life are given.

Using hints within his story, scholars have assigned the beginning of his ministry to 877 B.C. when Israel's King Omri built his palace in Samaria.

Elijah's ministry, according to the biblical report, lasted 28 years. But because it is said that his disciple and successor Elisha received a "double portion" of the Spirit from Elijah, and his ministry lasted 70 years, then Elijah's would be expected to last 35 years, which pushes it back to 877 B.C.

It is seven years after that when Elijah gives his announcement to King Ahab of a coming drought in the land. But before this, there are indications that Elijah had prophesied against Baal worship, which had caused Jezebel to try to kill the prophets of God in the land even before Elijah's pronouncement of the drought.

We learn later that Obadiah, King Ahab's "master of the house" or steward, but also a believer in Yahweh, hides 100 prophets from Jezebel's wrath in caves, and secretly feeds them. (referred to in **1 Kings 18:13**).

Strangely, there is only one reference to Elijah in the book of Chronicles (**2 Chronicles 21:12**), which mentions a letter that he wrote to King Jehoram of Judah, indicting him for idolatry and murder; but this brief detail is not attested in the books of Kings, nor does it easily fit with the most widely accepted chronology, according to which Elijah would have been "taken up" before Jehoram's reign. There are no references to Elisha in Chronicles.

There are numerous parallels between the miracles of Elijah and Elisha and those of Jesus, which we'll talk about as we come across them in our readings.

Elijah and John the Baptist

In the later prophets, the figure of Elijah becomes enormously important - his "return" will be a sign of the coming of Messiah.

- **Malachi 3:1** - "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty."

- **Malachi 4:5-6** - "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes."

In the New Testament, Jesus says John the Baptist represents Elijah.

- **Luke 1:17** - "He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Gabriel speaking to Zechariah of John the Baptist)

Closely associated with the wilderness:

- **Isaiah 40:3** - "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (quoted in **Luke 3:4**)

- **Matthew 11:14** - "He is Elijah who is to come."

- **Matthew 17:12-13** - "I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased....Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist."

John's aggressive confrontations with Herod and Herodias mirror Elijah's stance against Ahab and Jezebel. (**Mark 6:17**)

And we already noted the association between the "sacred prostitutes" worshiping idols with the "hypocrites" exemplified by the Pharisees of Jesus' day. (**Job 36:13-14**)

The brook Cherith where Elijah is fed by the ravens, is in the rugged Gilead mountains not far from Elijah's hometown of Tishbe. Now called the Wadi el-Yabis. This was near where John the Baptist had been baptizing (not the place near Jericho where Jesus was baptized), and where Jesus retreated to after the Transfiguration at Caesarea Philippi in the north (**Mark 10:1**)

This is also a few miles from Pella, where Christian believers escape from Jerusalem before its destruction, according to Eusebius.

The place where John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan is also the place revered as the location of Elijah's being taken up by the whirlwind and the chariot of fire (**2 Kings 2**). So there are many close associations between John and Elijah.

This chapter opens with Elijah's declaration of a coming drought.

During the three and a half years of drought, the events in 1 Kings 17 take place -

- Elijah fed by ravens
- Miracle of overflowing cruse of oil and never ending supply of grain
- Widow's son raised from the dead

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 means, "Yahweh is my God."

Gilead was across the Jordan River to the east in Trans-Jordan.

This prophecy or prayer of Elijah was a miraculous event.

- **James 5:17-18** - "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

The source of Elijah's power was that he knew "the LORD God of Israel liveth..."

God commands that Elijah Flee

1 Kings 17:2-4 - "And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."

The name Cherith is from the Hebrew "to cut off." God was about to do some pruning in Elijah's life.

This experience was to train Elijah to trust solely in God. Ravens were unclean animals, but God would use them to sustain Elijah. The prophet would have to be content with doing nothing and trusting in God for sustenance from the beaks of unclean birds. Spiritual food can come to us even from an unclean source, if God chooses.

We can compare this to Jesus being ministered to by angels in the wilderness:

- **Matthew 4:11** - "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."

But then the brook runs dry! Has your brook ever suddenly run dry just as you were trying to do what God told you to do?

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."

One scholar says this was because God wants to "drain us of self", as He drained the apostles by ten days of waiting before Pentecost." The drought was God's doing. God wants us to realize that his living water never runs dry! He will take care of us no matter what it looks like.

So God sends him to a different area to receive help from a widow, the poorest of society.

Zarephath was in the territory of Sidon, the Gentile city where Jezebel was from and

ground zero of Baal worship. Instead of taking him away from danger, it looked like God was placing him in even greater peril.

This guidance from God probably seemed unreasonable and crazy to Elijah. But it could be that no one in Israel was bold enough to aid Elijah and defy Jezebel.

Jesus comments on this moment in Elijah's story to critique the Jews' rejection of Him:

- **Luke 4:24-26** - "Then He said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow'"

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."

But the woman doesn't seem to know about God's commandment. This show that God often works unseen and unrecognized in our lives.

She seems frustrated with Elijah's request, explaining that she's literally at the end of her rope.

1 Kings 17:12 - "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."

"As the Lord liveth" - she was a believer the Yahweh rather than Baal. But she was almost in despair.

In fact, it seems like Elijah is there to help *her* and not the other way around.

1 Kings 17:13-14 - "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. 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."

The widow needed to believe that God would miraculously renew her food and drink if she gave her last morsel to Elijah. This is like the faith of the poor widow who gave her last coins to the Temple treasury:

- **Luke 21:2-4** - "...and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

She was blessed, but she also was able to bless the prophet Elijah with her gift.

But first she had to "prime the pump" so to speak. Early water pumps required that you pour a little water in the pump to wet the seal to allow it to activate the suction to pull water out of the ground.

Faith always entails risk.

The widow had to act on her belief in what Elijah said. Elijah in turn had to believe and speak what God had told him.

The process is instructive. God didn't bring a wagon load of grain or barrels of oil to her house all at once. Each day she would take a little out to use, and the supply would appear empty again, but then that would be replaced miraculously. It required faith every single day, but produced daily miracles.

This miracle is reflected in Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. There the same kind of miracle occurred - the fish and bread multiplied as they were emptied out. (**Matthew 14:14-21**)

As we empty our selves, we can experience a miraculous filling and supply of our needs moment by moment.

Elijah Raises the Widow's Son

First Elijah's brook had dried up. Now the son of the widow God had sent him to became sick and 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?"

She no doubt had hoped her son would help provide for her in her old age. Now she is bereft. Her son's death brings to her mind a past sin that she blames Elijah for stirring up, and in hysteria blames him also for her son's death.

Elijah carries her son to the upper room where he was staying. He is at a loss - God had brought him to this house, and now it was hit by tragedy. He is close enough to God to call for an explanation.

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?"

God doesn't reply. Then Elijah makes a bold and desperate request:

1 Kings 17:21-22 - "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. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived."

This is the first incidence of someone resurrected from death in the Bible.

Jesus repeated this miracle of raising a widow's son from the dead:

- **Luke 7:11** - "And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people."

Elijah displayed great faith through all these experiences. He would need that faith facing the challenge of Ahab and Jezebel's persecution.

See an Elijah Timeline:

<https://www.bible.ca/chronology/bible-chronology-timeline-Elijah-Elisha-John-the-Baptist-Jesus-types-antitypes-870-810BC.htm#chronology>