

(1 Kings) Elijah's Early Ministry

by David Guzik

David Guzik explores the early ministry of Elijah, emphasizing his boldness, dependence on God, and the lessons learned through trials.

Duration: 1:00:44

Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:23-24, 1 Kings 17:1, 1 Kings 18:1

Topics: "Faith And Miracles", "Gods Provision"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Elijah and the widow's son from the Bible. The preacher highlights how the widow's faith in God deepens after witnessing the miracle of her son being brought back to life. The preacher also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and appreciating God's provision in our lives, both in material needs and spiritual matters. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the significance of God's unseen hand working in our lives and the transformative power of encountering God's miracles.

Transcript

Okay, tonight we're going to begin at 1 Kings chapter 17. My plan is for us to go through the middle of chapter 18. We've been normally taking two chapters on a Tuesday evening, but I want to slow it down just a little bit because we're really in a tremendously interesting part of the book of 1 Kings when we come here to the life of Eliza.

So let's just jump right into it. First Kings chapter 17, verse 1, and Elisha the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word. We remember how chapter 16 ended the last time we were together.

We saw that it described the reign of Ahab in Israel. Ahab was the son of Omri, and Omri started a new dynasty in the northern kingdom of Israel. And Ahab was an exceedingly wicked man in that not only did he continue on the pagan practices of Jeroboam before him, but he actually began the state-sponsored continuation or promotion, I should say, of these pagan gods, especially Baal.

And now, like a meteor, like a comet appearing in the sky, you have this man whom we've never heard of as to this point in 1 Kings. This man, Elisha, just bursts on the scene at this critical time and place, and it was a crucial time in the history of Judah and Israel that this prophet Elisha suddenly appeared. He became the dominant spiritual force in Israel during the dark days of Ahab's apostasy.

You know, the name Elisha means Yahweh is my God, and in these days when Ahab's government officially supported the worship of Baal and other gods, this prophet and his name told the truth. And it was a greatly crucial time in the history of Israel. It looked as if, in the northern kingdom at least, that the worship of the true God might be completely eliminated.

The land was swarming with the priests of Baal who were paid by Ahab and Jezebel, and it swarmed with their own places of worship, the groves and the high places that they brought over to their own place of worship. The persecution fires were lit against worshippers of the true God, and it was a radical, radical thing to be a follower of the true God in these days of Ahab and Jezebel. It seemed like apostasy was everywhere, and there was nobody truly serving the Lord.

And at that critical time, here comes this man Elisha, and did you notice what he said here in verse 17, excuse me, in verse 1 of chapter 17? As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word. Now again, do you remember the pagan god that Ahab and Jezebel were most interested in promoting? It was the pagan god Baal. And do you know what Baal's sphere of influence was, where he was really mighty? Baal was basically the weather god of ancient Canaan.

He was the sky god. Elisha was showing by this dramatic declaration that Baal isn't in charge of the weather, but the Lord God, that Yahweh is, and that his prophet by his prayers could stop the rain for this period of time. Here it was, he was showing by this very dramatic demonstration that Yahweh was mightier than Baal.

Now I need to tell you something that you don't pick up immediately from 1 Kings 17. If you were to only take these words, you might think that mainly Elisha was the prophet of this drought, but he was more than that. It's alluded to here, it's sort of hinted at here, but it's made even more clear in the book of James, that Elisha was the cause of the drought.

Let me read to you James chapter 5, verses 17 and 18. Elisha was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Isn't that remarkable? This Elisha did not only prophesy the drought, he made it. He made it through his own prayer before God. Now he had the strength to do this, the power to do this, because if you notice his word here to Ahab in verse 1, he says, as the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these three years except at my word.

This was the source of Elisha's strength. It is specifically told to us in James that Elisha was a man with a nature like ours. Sometimes we don't want to believe that, right? We look at a great man of spiritual power like this, and we think, he must be very different from us.

He must be just cut from a different cloth, a man of a different order. I mean, he can be his thing and do his thing, but I could never be like that. James will not allow us to think that.

He tells us very plainly that Elisha was a man with a nature like ours, yet he showed a strength, Elisha did, in his life that's far greater than the spiritual strength we show in our life with God. Why? What was the difference? What's the difference between me and Elisha? Well, I think these two principles here in verse 1 really point to this. First of all, he says, as the Lord God of Israel lives.

Listen, it seems that everybody else in the northern kingdom felt that the Lord was dead, that Baal was the living God, but not for Elisha. For Elisha, God was the living God and he would serve him. But secondly, he says there in verse 1, before whom I stand.

It's very interesting. When he made this proclamation to Ahab, he's standing right in front of the king and he's telling him this, you know, at my word, no rain, no dew for as long as I give the word here, he's standing in the presence of a king. But at the same time, he was aware that he was standing in the presence of somebody mightier than any earthly king.

Gabriel himself, the angel Gabriel, when he came and made his announcement to Zacharias in the temple announcing the birth of John the Baptist, he said, I'm Gabriel who stand in the presence of the living God. Elisha was aware of the presence of God in his daily life. I think this is the difference.

God was alive to Elisha and Elisha lived in the presence of God. This was the source of his spiritual strength that really marks the difference between a man like Elisha and a man like me. If I had more of this awareness, I would be more like Elisha.

And again, it wasn't just easy for a man like this. We tend to think of a man who could stop the rain, who could stop the dew for three and a half years by his prayers. And we tend to think of a spiritual Superman.

He stands up, you know, when the fiery darts of the enemy, they just bounce off of his chest and nothing hurts him. Nothing damages him. It's not like that.

Look at it here in verses two through five. Then the word of the Lord came to him saying, get away from here and turn eastward and hide by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it shall be that you shall drink from the brook.

And I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The drought announced by Elijah in the previous verses was a great threat to the northern kingdom of Israel and to King Ahab.

Therefore, his life was in danger. Listen, if Elijah is the one stopping the rain because of his prayers, I know how to get the rain back. Just kill Elijah and the rain will come back.

And so God said, I want to protect you. I want to get you away. I want to take you first to say something to Ahab.

Then I want you to hide away before this brook. I find it interesting that God led Elijah one step at a time. Did you notice this? He didn't say, OK, Elijah, here's the plan.

First, deliver the message to Ahab. Then go to the brook Cherith. You're going to hide there for a long time.

And I'm going to have water for you. And I'm going to bring ravens to feed you with with food that they bring in their mouths. And then the next thing and then the next thing.

No, no, no. One thing at a time. Isn't that frustrating when God does that with us? We want the whole thing told to us in advance, right? But oftentimes God says, no, I'm going to tell you what you should be doing now.

Well, Lord, what about the future? What about the next thing? What about the next thing after that? Because there's no, no, no. I'll tell you what you should do now. And just listen there.

And then he tells him, I want you to go and hide by the brook Cherith. I think you can say here that in this experience, God was teaching Elijah the value of the hidden life. Now, here he had just become a famous man.

You know, I think of it if you were to translate today's technology and today's media, you know, into the ancient world. And there you have Elijah coming up before a king or the leader of a nation. And he says, there's going to be no rain in this nation for three years.

And then there's no rain. Everybody's, whoa, what's going on here? And that man would instantly be a celebrity in the nation, wouldn't he? He'd be famous. He'd be on the cover of the magazines.

People would love him or hate him, but he would be famous. God says, no, no, no, Elijah, I'm going to take you out of the fame, out of the celebrity status. Now, I want you to come and just be hidden with me.

At the very moment when Elijah seemed most famous, most successful, most like a celebrity, God says, Elijah, come and hide and be alone with me. We shouldn't be surprised if God works the same way in our own life. And so he says, okay, I'll go, I'll leave, and then I'll go and I'll be nourished by the waters from the brook, and the ravens will feed me there.

The escape to the brook Cherith was for more than just protection. It was also to train Elijah in dependence upon the Lord. Now, look, what did he just call for? A drought, right? Now, would the drought affect that brook that was flowing by him as well? Yeah, but you just go and you sit there and wait.

Now, it's easy to pray for a drought when you have plenty of water in your own house. It's different to pray for a drought when you see your own brook growing drier and drier and drier. By the way, the name Cherith, it comes from the ancient Hebrew root word to cut away or to cut up or to cut off.

It shows that God had some cutting to do in the life of Elijah during this period. And he said, I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. As a matter of fact, in the Hebrew here, when it says it in verse 4, where it says, I have commanded the ravens to feed you there, the emphasis in the Hebrew is on there.

I think about this. The ravens are going to come and bring food to Elijah in their mouths. The ravens could go anywhere, right? The ravens could fly to Syria.

They could fly to Moab. They could fly anywhere. But no, God says, I'm going to send the ravens to you there at Cherith.

Elijah maybe wanted to be somewhere else. Maybe he wanted to be preaching. Maybe he wanted to be doing something else.

God said, no, I'm going to provide for you there. You go there to the brook Cherith. And that's what happened.

Look at verse 6. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. And he drank from the brook. Now put on your thinking cap here for a minute.

I want you to think just for a moment here. You know, in the Old Testament law, you had clean animals and unclean animals, right? Ravens clean or unclean, unclean scavengers. You're not supposed to eat ravens.

Matter of fact, you're not supposed to eat anything that a raven has touched. And how did God command that this prophet would be fed? Every bit of food that he ate there at Cherith was brought to him in the beak of an unclean animal. Instantly, Elijah was confronted with something.

He had to put away his traditional ideas of clean and unclean, or he would die of salvation. I think God was teaching Elijah a lot. I think he was cutting.

He was breaking. He was molding Elijah in these times. And one thing that he was teaching him was he was teaching him that the spirit of the law is more important than the letter of the law.

You know that whenever I'm teaching in a passage of scripture, I always like to read the whatever sermons Charles Spurgeon has preached on them. And Spurgeon preached a great sermon from this text. Really remarkable.

He drew two points of application from this idea that the ravens, the unclean animals, brought Charles Spurgeon, brought Elijah the food, didn't bring the Charles Spurgeon as far as I know. He said, you should learn these things. First of all, you should understand that God may bring a good word to you through an unclean vessel.

We don't want to think that, right? If somebody comes and rebukes us or says something or teaches something or we get criticized or something like that, what do we instantly want to do? We want to look for a reason why they are not a legitimate messenger of God to us. Look at the sin in their life. They're suffering much worse.

They're this, they're this, they have a bad motive. They're too critical, whatever. You know, all of that may be true.

They may be a raven that God is using to bring you something that you need. But secondly, and this was the second point of application, it really struck me. He said, you know what? You can bring spiritual food to others and still be spiritually unclean yourself.

Isn't that scary to think about? I wonder, you know, sometimes we think that the people in the pulpits, you know, around our nation, around the world, you know, sometimes God can use them. And yet they remain unclean themselves. Well, God used these ravens to bring it and brought it very faithfully.

It says there in verse six, bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. As faithfully as God provided manna for Israel in the wilderness, God provided for Elijah's need. He came to trust every day in this miraculous provision of God.

He was very, very confident of this. God was teaching his prophet here. One other thing I should just consider, and it just comes to my mind here as I'm looking at this.

You know, God didn't make Elijah learn these lessons before he started using him. This is Elijah's school of ministry, right? Right here by the brook Cherith. And he's learning deep lessons on how to be used by God.

But God didn't say, you have to complete all of your education before I use you. No, he used him. And then he said, now let's take you deeper into your education.

Well, if you want to get educated, verse seven is essential here. And it happened after a while that the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Why was there no rain in the land? Because Elijah was praying for no rain in the land.

Elijah saw the flow of that brook slow down and down and down until it dried up. His source of water was gone. And I see that in our spiritual life, that sometimes God will bring us to a brook that's drying up some source of provision, some source of nourishment, some source of encouragement in your life.

And you see it just fading away. One commentator I read, he listed several ways that this could apply to us, this principle. He said, you know, there's the drying brook of popularity.

Your popularity just seems to go away, away, away until it's gone. You know, the example he used for that was John the Baptist. I mean, think of John the Baptist.

One time John the Baptist preached and it said all of Judea came out to hear John the Baptist. And then a while later, what's he doing? He's dying alone and forgotten in jail. The brook of popularity in his life dried up.

It may do so for us. There's the drying brook of health. You know, one day you're really nourished by your good health.

You're strong, you're healthy. Oh, it's all great. And then like a drying brook, you just see it leaving and leaving and leaving.

And then suddenly you're just not as healthy as you were before. There can be the drying brook of money. Yeah, one time, sure, the water's flowing, the money's flowing, right? You have enough in your life and you don't think of yourself as rich, but there's enough.

But you just see the brook drying and drying and drying until suddenly it seems like it's gone. There can be the drying brook of friendship. Oh, yeah, he used to have such strong friends, such great friendships.

He said, oh, yes, praise the Lord for my great friendships. And then you just see those diminish and diminish and diminish. And then they dry away, just like this brook did for Elijah.

Why does God do that in our life? I'll tell you why. The brook in Elijah's life, it was a gift from him, right? The same way that popularity or your health or money or friendship, all of those things are gifts from God. But God is very jealous that we will not love his gifts more than we love him.

And so sometimes he'll let the gifts that he has given to us, gifts that are good, he'll just let them slow, slow, slow and fade away so that we're drained of self, so that we're drained of all the things that we would trust in ourselves or in the gifts that God would give us. And we would learn to just trust God alone. And, you know, Elijah was trusting the Lord right there, right? So Elijah prayed for this drought.

God answered the prayer. I don't know about you, but if I was Elijah, I would start praying for rain, at least for a very small local rainstorm right around where I was or something like that. But you see, he kept the purpose of God first, even when it adversely affected him.

He said, no, no, the purpose of God is to have drought on this land. And if the drought affects me, then that's what we're going to put first. So now into verse eight and nine.

Then the word of the Lord came to him saying, Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you. So you see Elijah here, right? Bold, famous proclamation.

Elijah, the celebrity, makes the pronouncement to King Ahab, and then he flees away and he stays by this brook, Jareth. I don't know how long. It could have been weeks.

It could have been a month. We're not told how long it was until one day the ravens aren't coming anymore. And the brook is all dried up.

And Lord, what do you want me to do? And then finally, God guides me. He says, this is what I want you to do. And so what does he do? He goes, OK, go to go to Sidon, to Zarephath there.

And there's going to be a widow who takes care of you. God led Elijah from the dry brook to a Gentile city. Might I remind you, Sidon, that's the country north of Israel, what we would call modern day Lebanon.

This isn't Israel. It's almost as if God is getting crazier and crazier with Elijah. First, leads him to a drying brook.

Second, leads him to a Gentile city. God kept transplanting Elijah from home to Jezreel, to Jareth, to Zarephath. But like a plant under the hands of a very skillful gardener, each time of transplanting made him stronger.

Each time of transplanting made his plant grow stronger and better. And here he goes right up to Sidon, to Zarephath. And God says, see, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.

Now, I have to say that when God spoke that to Elijah, he must have done either one of two things. He must have either laughed or cried. I don't know which one.

Because God said, yeah, I've commanded a widow to provide you. Do you understand? Widows were notorious for their poverty in the ancient world. God told Elijah to go to a Gentile's widow and receive provision.

He probably thought, you know what? It makes more sense for me to wait by this brook and wait for the water to come back. You're telling me to go wait upon a Gentile poor person and they're going to provide for me. God, are you crazy? What are you trying to do here? It's not as if he said, well, go to the richest man, you know, in the kingdom of Israel and he'll provide.

It wasn't any of that. It was, no, go to a Gentile city and a widow will provide for you. By the way, when Jesus was rejected by his own people, he used the example of Elijah's coming to the widow of Zarephath as an illustration of God's right to choose a people unto himself.

Listen to this. It's from Luke chapter 4, verses 24 through 26. We read, 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. Why did God send him to this Gentile widow? Because God wanted to do it.

That's why he did it. Right now, look, verse 10. So he arose and went to Zarephath.

I don't know if he went laughing or crying, but he went. He arose and went to Zarephath and when he had come to the gate of the city, indeed, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, please bring me a little water and a cup that I may drink.

And as she was going to get it, he called her and said, please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand. Isn't this amazing? He goes, listen, God, it's crazy enough that you called me. Why not? I'll just start asking any widow I see for some food, some food and some water.

Now, you need to understand something. It says a widow was there gathering sticks. In the understanding of the ancient Hebrews, we're supposed to understand that this woman was very poor and she's grabbing, she's gathering little pieces of wood to use as firewood.

Now, I know what I would have thought if I was Elijah. I said, oh, Lord, praise you, God. You're so wonderful, Lord.

You've got a rich widow in Zarephath for me to be supported by. Isn't that, God, isn't that great? You'd love to do that. You're going to lead me to a rich widow who can provide for all of my needs.

And so who does he talk to when he first gets into town? He talks to a poor widow, a widow so poor that for her firewood, she has to just go outside and scavenge around for whatever scraps she can find. She didn't even have firewood. She just was grabbing a few sticks to use this.

Now, I find this very interesting here. Did you see what God told Elijah back in verse 9? I skipped over it, but maybe you saw it. Where it says there in verse 9, Go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there.

See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you. So I thought, okay, great. All I got to do is find the widow that God has commanded to provide for me.

Maybe he would have come into the city and just started shouting, Okay, I'm Elijah, the prophet from Israel. God's spoken to one of you widows and told you to provide for me. Which one of you is it? Now, what I think is interesting about this is this woman here, as we'll find out, she seems completely unaware that God has commanded her to do anything.

It's like, Oh, God commanded me to provide what he didn't seem to tell me. This woman is a wonderful illustration of how the unseen hand of God works. She gets up in the morning.

You know, she's going through a daily routine and she looks at the, I need some firewood. I can't buy any firewood. I'm too poor.

I can't chop it. I don't have the resources. Look, I just got to go out in the street and look for some sticks to gather for firewood.

When she did that, God was guiding her according to his command that she would meet this prophet and minister to this need. The Lord spoke very truly when he said, I commanded a widow there, but yet he

worked on her in a way that she wasn't aware of. So what did he do? He speaks to the widow.

Yeah, bring me some water in a cup and bring me a morsel of bread in your hand. You see, common sense and circumstances would have told Elijah just the opposite. Okay.

Common sense and circumstances. Gentile woman. I am a Jew and I pretty much despise you because you're a Gentile.

You're poor. You don't have any real significance in this city or in society. But look, why don't you wait upon me and go get me some water and give me some of your food to eat, even though you're very, very poor.

Now, I wouldn't blame this woman for saying, what are you crazy? Why did God pick this woman? I don't know. I really don't know. But I tell you what he chose her to do.

He chose her to serve this prophet. And so look, verse 12. So she said, as the Lord, your God lives, I don't have any bread, only a handful of flour in a bin and a little oil in a jar.

I'm gathering a couple of sticks that I may go and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die. I just can't believe Elijah. I know what I would have said.

I said, do you know any other widows in this town? I would have felt so. No, I'm sorry. You know, I must be the wrong widow.

I'm sorry. I'm looking for the one that God has commanded to provide for all my needs. We see something wonderful in this woman.

What did she say here in verse 12? She started out by saying, as the Lord, your God lives. Now, that's a very polite form of address. She respected God.

But at the same time, she recognized that the God of Israel was Elijah's God, not her own. And then she says, listen, I respect you. I respect that you're from Israel.

Fine, Mr. Prophet, whatever your name is, that's great. However, let me tell you something. I'm not just poor.

I'm desperately poor. These sticks I'm gathering right here, I'm gathering these sticks so I can prepare the last meal my son and I will ever eat because we are about to die. Look at verse 13 and 14.

Elijah said to her, do not fear. Go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first and bring it to me. And afterward, make some for yourself and your son.

For thus says the Lord God of Israel, the bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth. You know, the first word that Elijah spoke as a prophet to the woman, not just as a traveling Israelite man, but as a prophet was do not fear. This was God's first word to the widow through Elijah.

Her present crisis made her afraid. God wanted her to put away all fear and to replace it with trust in him. And then he says, fine, you've got this last meal you're going to make for yourself.

This is what I'm asking you to do first. Make me something to eat from it first. That was a just a rude request for Elijah to make.

He asked this destitute widow to first give him something from her last bit of food. You know, I've seen it on the television many, many times. I don't know if you have, if you had the opportunity to see it or not.

I've seen on the television many, many times where some, you know, evangelist or some man with a great big television ministry that needs a lot of money to sustain. You know, he's appealing to old women, to old widows, send me your money. You know, and he's just robbing them.

It's this predatory fundraising. Doesn't it seem like Elijah is guilty of this here? We're thinking, oh, Elijah, you're making a big mistake. Why don't you fish around in your pocket and give something to this woman instead of asking something from her? But listen, he was giving her something.

Basically, what he told her is if you make this step of faith, look at what God's going to do. He says, the bin of flour shall not be used up, nor the jar of oil run dry until the Lord sends rain on the earth. This shows us why Elijah could make such an audacious request.

It was because God told him that he would provide a never ending supply of food for the widow, for her son and for Elijah himself. He asked the widow, put your trust in the great promise of God. What an amazing thing he did.

Now look at it here, verse 15 and 16. So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Elijah.

The widow actually did it. She willingly put herself at great risk. Why? Because she trusted in this promise of God and God fulfilled his promise to the widow, to her son and to Elijah.

Do you see what he did? God used this woman as a channel of supply and her needs were met as a result. That's how God wants to bless. He wants to bless you, but to bless you as a channel by which other people can be blessed.

He doesn't want to bless you and just have the blessing stop with you. But how did it work for the woman? Day by day. Ask yourself, why didn't God just go and drop a whole room full of flour on the woman at once? You know, why not? Why did God make her do it every day? She has to go in there every day.

She closes her eyes. She draws the thing in and she scoops up and she brings up. Oh, there's more flour in the pot.

Every day she pours for the oil is in. There's more oil in the pot and she puts it down. Now, of course, after a couple of weeks of that, she's like, well, of course, it's going to be there.

Your faith is built up, right? But can you imagine this widow at the first? She's like, oh, no, it's going to be gone. It's all gone. No, there's more.

Why didn't God just put it on her all at once? It wasn't just because God was testing her faith. Think if God would have given her a whole room full of flour. How much of it would have been left the very next day? I don't think any of it would have been left in times of famine.

Men can smell when food's around, you know, there would have been all the people from the city knocking at a door right then. Give us this food that you've had miraculously provided for. But when God provides this little by little, then it goes in the intended way.

Instead of causing a riot and robbing the woman and maybe killing her and her son. Now, all of these people, the widow, her son and Elijah are all fed for a long, long time. What's a beautiful picture here.

But do you see how God was working in Elijah? First, I want you to speak to the pagan king. Well, he was an Israelite, but he was acting like a pagan Ahab. Then I want you to be fed from the lips of an uncle, lips, the beak of an unclean bird.

Birds don't have lips, they have beaks. I want you to be fed from the mouth of an unclean word, a bird. And then secondly, I want you to be fed from the hand of a Gentile woman.

God was leading Elijah along the way. Well, everything seems wonderful until verse 17. Now, it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick.

And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, what have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to kill my son? You know, I think of this whole scene with Elijah and the widow and the widow's son. You can imagine the happy days of provision, right? How happy the household was.

Man, how wonderful it is. After she got over the faith shock of having to trust every day of putting the scoop into the bin where the flour was. Man, after a few weeks, it's like, yes, it's time to eat.

Let's go see what God's going to provide today. And she goes and they scoop. It's just happy days.

God's providing. Everything's wonderful. Their needs were being supplied by a continuing miracle of God.

But those happy days were eventually covered by a dark shadow. First, the sickness and then the death of the widow's son. The death of this son was a double blow to the widow.

Not only did she suffer as any woman would who had lost a child, but she also suffered because this child was her only hope for the future. You know, a widow had the only hope that her children would grow up and be able to support her in her old age. And so this was a double strike to the woman.

All of her expectation, all of her hope was shattered. And that's why she says to Elijah, Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and kill my son? You see, at the death of her son, the widow indirectly blamed Elijah, but she more directly blamed herself in an unnamed sin. Didn't that make you feel for this widow? We don't know what this sin was in her life.

But it haunted her. The guilty memory of that sin was always close to her. And at this time of tragedy, or maybe it was at any time of tragedy, she thought, well, that's why it's because of my sin.

It's because of my sin. Elijah is going to prove her wrong. Look at it here.

Verse 19. And he said to her, Give me your son. So she took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his own bed.

Then he cried out to the Lord and said, Oh, Lord, my God, have you also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge by killing her son? Isn't this very vivid? What a beautiful scene this is. Did you notice what it said there in verse 19? So he took him out of her arms. Can you just see the widow holding on to her boy so tightly? She can't let him go.

He's dead. There's no life left in the boy, but she's clinging on to him. And the prophet practically has to pry the little boy out of her strong arms.

And then what does he do? He carries her up to the upper room where he's staying. And then he cried out to the Lord. He stretched himself or excuse me, laid him on the bed.

And what did he do? Lord, what have you done? He prayed with a great heart, with intimacy with God. So, God, what are you doing here? He said, Lord, I know that you've led me here. I can't believe that you're responsible for this tragedy.

So look, as he continues in his prayer, verse 21, and he stretched himself out on the child three times and cried out to the Lord and said, Oh, Lord, my God, I pray let this child's soul come back to him. Lord heard the voice of Elijah and the soul of the child came back to him and he revived. And 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 lives. Then the woman said to Elijah, Now, by this, I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth. Now, the first thing we're struck by these verses is Elijah's prayer technique.

He stretched himself out on the child three times and cried out to the Lord. Now, you and I, I mean, when the prayer teams up front, you know, after service and people are coming up for prayer, we think something really weird was going on. If this happened up at the prayer time up front and you say, well, Elijah, what are you doing? What can I just say? Elijah had no example or precedent for this.

Do you realize in the scriptures? We don't have an example of where this is somebody being, you know, revived from death. He didn't know what to do. Is this written down in a book or something? You know, pray, you know, five our fathers and three Hail Mary's.

There's nothing like that in a book. He doesn't know. He's just trying.

He's saying, I don't know. I don't think that the child was revived because of his prayer technique. I don't think it was like, well, you know, if you only stretch yourself out on the child two times, if you would have done it three, then God would have answered.

You know, if it was four, that would have been wrong. No, no, no. I don't think God is paying much attention to the technique.

Elijah is just trying something. He's going, I don't know what to do. I'm going to do this.

And so he says, oh, Lord, my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him. It's a beautiful prayer. Look at the arguments here.

First of all, he says, oh, Lord, my God, listen, your Lord, your God, you can do this. I know who I'm praying. I'm not praying to bail.

I'm not praying to Asherah. Those are nothings. I'm praying to the Lord God of Israel.

And then she said, let this child's soul, the child of this widow. She needs this child. You need to revive him and then let the soul come back to this boy.

And God heard the voice of Elijah. The son was raised and God provided for this widow on every level, not just for her material needs, but for what she needed in her family with the resuscitation of her son. You might remind you this is the first example in the Bible of someone coming back from the dead.

First one in the whole Bible. We're all the way into first Kings, but none of biblical history before this time had somebody been brought back from the dead. But I need to make a distinction here.

Don't forget the difference between being revived and being resurrected. What's the difference between the two? When you're revived, as was this boy, as was Lazarus when Jesus brought him forth from the tomb, when you're revived, you come back to life, but it's to die again. When you're resurrected, you come to life and bodily speaking, but it's to never die again.

You know, I love some of the old church traditions, some of the old paintings you'll see of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised, you know, the brother of Mary and Martha. They always show Lazarus to be a very, very sad man. You say, well, why? Why would Lazarus be so sad? Because he had to die twice.

How many people have to die twice? Well, Lazarus did. This boy did. I guess it's not so fun to have to die twice.

So there's a big difference between being revived from death and being resurrected. The first example of it. I think you also have to be struck by what the widow said.

It is a glorious thing when God meets our material needs, right? We all rejoice for it. Oh, Lord, you brought the flour. You brought the oil.

You're bringing it day by day. It's a miracle of your provision, and we thank you for it. But isn't it interesting that I think that those material needs that are provided for, for some reason, and I don't know if I can fully explain it, but for some reason, they don't reach down deeply in the soul as other great works that God does.

Let me explain to you what I mean by that. God provided manna for Israel in the wilderness for 40 years, and yet they found it very easy to reject him and rebel against him. And here, the widow makes this amazing profession of faith after she saw her material needs provided for all the time.

But now with this miracle, she says in verse 24, now by this, I know that you're a man of God. You almost feel like Elijah said the flour and the oil. That wasn't what was that? Nothing? Shouldn't you believe because of that? But I don't know what it is.

I don't know if I can explain it. This is more just an observation than some great principle. But yes, we praise God for his material provision, and we rely on it.

We count on it. But for some reason, this miracle, because it had to do with her own son, it struck her heart in a far deeper way. Well, but what about Elijah? Well, God's taking care of him, right? First by the brook Cherith, then in Zarephath with the widow there.

But now in chapter 18, beginning at verse one, it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year saying, go present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth. So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab, and there was a severe famine in Samaria. I wish I knew how it worked with Elijah's prayer for the famine.

I mean, when I get to heaven, I'm kind of mentally making this list of questions that I want to ask people in the Bible. And I want to ask Elijah, Mr. Elijah, Mr. Prophet. May I call you Elijah? I don't know how I'll address him.

I'll say, but how did it work when you prayed for that drought? I mean, did you have to pray for it every day? Did you pray for it every night? Every morning? Every evening? I mean, I can just see Elijah as a normal custom of his daily prayer time. And Lord, keep the drought over all the northern kingdom of Israel. Do it until your appointed time.

Father, keep the drought. Because we're told that this drought lasted for three and a half years because Elijah prayed it to be so. You know, and I don't think it was at the very beginning.

He just said once, well, Lord, send a drought, and let me make it last a long time in Yahweh's name. Amen. I don't think that was it.

I think he had to pray for this steadily. But there came a time as he was praying about this, as he continually sought the Lord about it. Can you imagine that day by day? Lord, do you want it to rain today or not? Yes, no.

Okay, no rain today. Lord, don't send it. Every day he had to stay in communion with God about it.

But after many days, the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year saying, Go present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth. Isn't it funny? What did God tell Elijah to do in verses two and three of the last chapter? He said, go hide yourself. Now he says, go present yourself.

Listen, there's a time to hide yourself and get alone with God. And there's also a time to present yourself to the world. Some people just want to be presented to the world all the time, and they should go hide themselves with the Lord for a while.

Other people should stop hiding, you know, with the Lord and go out and present themselves to the world and do what God wants them to do. Here, Elijah simply obeyed God's command. Yes, the drought began and ended because of his prayers, but not because of his will.

It happened because of the will of God. So, all right, I'll go present myself to Ahab. Now verse three.

And Ahab called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly. For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them fifty to a cave and had fed them with bread and water.

And Ahab had said to Obadiah, Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks. Perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive so that we will not have to kill any livestock. So they divided the land between them to explore it.

Ahab went one way by himself and Obadiah went another way by himself. Now, as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him. And as he recognized him, he fell on his face and said, Is that you, my Lord

Elijah? So he answered him, It is I. Go tell your master Elijah is here.

So he said, How have I sinned that you're delivering your servant to the hand of Ahab to kill me? As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you and where they have said he is not here. He took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. And now you say, Go tell your master Elijah is here.

And it shall come to pass as soon as I'm gone from you that the spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place where I do not know. And when I go and tell Ahab he could not find you, he will kill me. But I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth.

Was it not reported to my Lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid 100 men of the Lord's prophets, 50 to a cave and fed them with bread and water. And now you say, Go tell your master Elijah is here. He will kill me.

Interesting guy, this prophet Obadiah. Apparently, he was a very brave man who stood for God and his prophets in a difficult time. When Jezebel was persecuting the people of God, when she was looking for true leaders, for true prophets of the Lord, so she could capture them, arrest them and kill them.

This man Obadiah, who apparently had a high position in the government of Ahab and Jezebel, Obadiah was faithful to God and at great risk to his personal safety. He protected these prophets. Well, great.

He found them all. He protected them. He did all this.

And then now one day he's out. You know, it says right there in the text, how him and Ahab were looking for some kind of grass, some kind of spring, something green somewhere so that they could feed their livestock and it wouldn't be a total loss. And what happens? While he's out on his way, Elijah met him.

And they were at this great point of need, so great that the king himself was out looking for grass. And so here Obadiah is met by Elijah. And Elijah says, Yeah, go tell Ahab that I want to meet with him.

Didn't you love Obadiah's response there? I love what he says there in verse 12. He goes, No, no, no, Elijah. I know what's going to happen.

You're going to want me to go tell Ahab that I found you and then God's going to take you away to I don't know where. And then it's going to be on my off with my head. No, no, no, I'm not doing this.

I love how he says it to there in verse 13 and 14. How have I sinned that you're delivering your servant to the hand of Ahab? Because listen, what did I do wrong? That now I'm going to be the victim of all of this. See, Obadiah feared that if he announced that he had met Elijah and the prophet disappeared again, then Ahab would punish Obadiah for letting Elijah get away.

So what does he say? Look at it here in verse 15. Then Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts lives before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

Very kindly and wisely, Elijah responded to Obadiah's legitimate fears. You know, listen, if Obadiah, excuse me, if Elijah wanted to get some of the, you know, the arrogance that sometimes, you know, a man like this would get, he'd say, Listen, Obadiah, maybe I'll disappear and maybe I won't. You just do what I tell you to do.

You know, I'm the guy who's been bringing drought to this land for the last three and a half years because of my prayers. You just do what I tell you to do. No, no, no.

What did Elijah do? He goes, Obadiah, I understand this puts you in a tough spot. I respect that. I'm not going to make you a martyr for my convictions.

Listen, if you want to be a martyr for somebody's convictions, just make sure you're being a martyr for your own convictions. Don't make somebody else a martyr. So Obadiah was not going to be put in a dangerous place by Elijah.

Sends him out with this message. Look what happened here, verses 17 through 19. Then it happened when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said to him, Is that you, O troubler of Israel? I love that.

This is so classic. It's great. Ahab was, at least up to this point, as we studied the kings of Israel, Ahab was easily the wickedest and most ungodly king that the northern kingdom has yet had.

Yet he did not hesitate for a moment to blame the troubles in Israel on Elijah. If Ahab would simply stop the persecution of the people of God, then God would draw back. He would not, you know, continue with the drought anymore.

But the wicked king of Israel found it easier to blame the godly prophet than to look at it himself. Listen, I have to say, though, according to Ahab's theology, it made sense for him to think Elijah was the problem. You see, Ahab believed in Baal.

So much so that his government promoted and supported Baal worship and persecuted the true prophets and followers of Yahweh. Now, Ahab believed that Elijah had angered the sky god Baal and therefore Baal withheld the rain. That's how it worked in Ahab's head.

Oh, Elijah. You know, until we get him, until we stop this man who is offending Baal, Baal isn't going to send any rain. Ahab probably thought that Baal would hold back the rain until Elijah was caught and executed.

It makes sense in his twisted mind. You know what Ahab should have done? Should have opened his Bible. Deuteronomy chapter 28, verses 23 and 24 says that if Israel was disobedient, God would withhold rain.

So what are you going to do? Oh, whoa, it tells me right here in Deuteronomy that this is why drought has come upon the land, because we've been disobedient. But it's amazing this tendency that people have to immediately see the problem in somebody else instead of in themselves. That's why he said there in verse 17, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, is that you, O troubler of Israel? What does Elijah say back? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, and that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals.

Now, therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table. Well, here we have a fight between two theologies. According to the theology of Ahab, Baal sent the drought because he was angry with Elijah.

According to the theology of Elijah, God sent the drought because he was angry with Ahab. Now, can I just tell you something? They can't both be right. One of them is right.

One of them is wrong. And I want you to notice something. Do you see how practical theology is? How your idea of God and what pleases God and what displeases God and how God moves, it breaks down into practical daily action.

That's why Ahab wanted to kill Elijah. And that's why Elijah wanted to humble Ahab. So he says, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel.

Let's gather all the idol prophets of Baal and Asherah for this meeting at Mount Carmel. Now, I need you to know something. I'm going to skip ahead a little bit and tell you something that's later in the chapter, because we haven't read this so far.

But later in the chapter, we find out that Elijah did this all at the command of God. He wasn't just making it up as he went along. Hey, wouldn't it be a great plan? You know, we'll do this and we'll do that.

And Lord, bless my plans along the way. It wasn't like that at all. He did this at the command of God.

And I need to say one other thing. Elisha knew that it was absolutely critical to deal with these prophets of Baal before God sent rain to the land of Israel. It was crucial that when God sent the rain, everybody understood that it came from Yahweh and not from Baal.

Could you imagine how it would happen if God just started sending the rain again? What would the priest of Baal say? We did it. Thank you very much. That's why God's going to wait until there's this confrontation with the prophets of Baal first before he sends the rain.

And he says, you bring them all. Bring all the 450 prophets of Baal, the 400 prophets of Asherah, 850 prophets against one man. And all those ones who eat at Jezebel's table.

What does that tell you? That they were officially supported by the government of the kingdom of Israel. Jezebel was their special patron. And so now we come into verse 20 upon this very, very dramatic encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Asherah.

One man against 850. But we have to leave that for next week. It's a very, very exciting passage, but time gets away from us now.

We'll cover it next week. But you know, I just want to leave you with this one thought. Many people in our modern world think that theology is all theoretical.

It's all very esoteric. It's not really important. Who cares what your idea about God is or their idea about God? What does it really matter, right? Do you see from this passage? A theology translates into daily life right now.

You have a belief about God. You have a theology. And that theology influences your life.

Maybe you think that God isn't there or he doesn't care. That influences your life. Maybe you think that God is there and that God cares, but that God is always angry with you.

That influences your life. Maybe you think that God is pleased with you because you have a faith relationship with Jesus Christ and you've accepted what he has done on the cross as payment for your sins. That affects your life.

We see it very clearly illustrated between Ahab and Elijah. What we think about God matters. And therefore, we just don't want to be theologians because each one of us are.

We want to be biblical theologians. We want to know what God says about himself and to learn that from the Bible. That's what we hope to do in these times when we study the word together, but not just so that we can get theoretical knowledge in our mind.

Yes, theoretical knowledge is good, but we see it works out into very practical application implications in our life. Will it change your life if you really believe that there's a God in heaven who answers prayer? I think so. Elijah believed it.

So should we. Let's pray and then we'll take a few minutes out after the time of prayer to answer any questions people have. Father, thank you for showing us this amazing example of this prophet of God, Elijah.

Lord, we think about him and we think of what an amazing, strong, devoted man of God he was. And then, Lord, we remember how the scriptures tell us that he is really just like us. So, Lord, if Elisha can have our weaknesses and our failings, we believe that we can have his faith in his relationship with you.

Teach us how to have this, Lord. Speak to us. Move in our life, move in our hearts.

Give us a true biblical theology. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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