

1st KINGS

Week 28, Chapter 17

As we continue in our study of 1st Kings, the northern kingdom of Israel has just hit the bottom of a spiritual death spiral. The 10 tribes have a new king whose first prominent action was to renounce Yehoveh God of Israel (who at the time was being represented by the two golden calf idols that Jeroboam had manufactured), and replace Yehoveh with Ba'al. Ba'al was the god of King **Achav's** new wife, Jezebel, who was a native of Sidon and Tyre. We need to keep her home nation in mind today because it plays a kind of hidden role in one of the Biblical narratives that we'll examine.

1st Kings chapter 17 introduces us to one of the greatest men in the entire Bible, **Eliyahu**. He is better known in Christian circles as Elijah the prophet. The story of **Eliyahu** covers the next 3 chapters in 1st Kings, and then picks up again early in the Book of 2nd Kings. He is so important that **Yeshua** invokes Elijah's name on more than one occasion, and later OT prophets like **Malachi** also speak about him. It's likely that Elijah himself is going to play a key role during the future period that the Church calls the Great Tribulation (we'll talk more about that later).

We're going to discuss Elijah quite extensively because God chose to use this strange man mightily, and entrust him with divine power to perform miracles that in some ways exceeded that of Moses. So with that, let's read 1st Kings chapter 17.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 17 all

This mysterious man **Eliyahu** simply bursts onto the scene out of nowhere. There is no

genealogy given, there is no account of how he came to be a prophet of Yehoveh, there is no life history (like it was with Samuel, for instance). We know nothing of this man's earlier life and even though some mention of where he came from is recorded, it is a very general account and ambiguous at that.

We are told that he is from a place called **Tishbe**, but he is also an inhabitant of Gilead. Scholars have different takes on what this means. The most accepted is that his birthplace is the town of **Tishbe** (located in the Upper Galilee region in the territory of the tribe of Naphtali), but that at some point he immigrated across the Jordan River to Gilead for an unstated reason. Further there is never a mention of his tribe. In fact, a handful of later scholars took the radical approach that since his Israelite tribe wasn't given that he wasn't even a Hebrew, but rather he was a gentile. That wouldn't fit the context of the story whatsoever and is, frankly, a Replacement Theology agenda driven fabrication that serious Bible scholars of all ilks dismiss out of hand. Some Jewish Torah scholars say that he was a Benjamite, others that he was of the tribe of Gad (which would explain him residing in Gilead) and others insist that he was a Levite. Many of the Early Church Fathers agreed that he was a Levite and so does the Jewish Cabalistic literature of later times.

I'm in agreement with those Early Church Fathers that he was a Levite because it was typical for a Levite to be born in one place but to eventually move somewhere else to serve God; and also because in the next chapter that speaks of his war against the prophets of Ba'al on Mt. Carmel where he performed a sacrifice, he did so without an intermediary (namely, a priest). Only Levite priests could perform sacrifices and it is highly doubtful that the Lord Himself would order Elijah to sacrifice on an altar if Elijah wasn't a priest of proper lineage.

For a reason not given to us in the Scriptures, our first glimpse of **Eliyahu** has him confronting King **Achav**, probably at his palace in Samaria. And Elijah is threatening the king with the warning that he is going to bottle up the skies and not only stop the needed rainfall but also keep dew from forming on the ground. Further that until Elijah orders it to begin again no moisture will be provided for growing crops and filling the rivers and streams.

Hebrew Tradition is that **Eliyahu** used the occasion of the death of Hiel's two sons to come to the king's palace to bring God's oracle to him. In the previous chapter we see that someone named Hiel volunteered to rebuild the destroyed city of Jericho, even in the face of a divinely ordained curse against anyone who would attempt it. Jericho had laid in ruins until now, since Israel first crossed the Jordan, led by Joshua, and God laid the wicked Canaanite city waste. Hiel did it anyway, and God reacted accordingly by carrying out the consequences of the curse and seeing to the death of two of Hiel's sons.

No doubt it was the apostate King **Achav** who put Hiel up to this misguided construction project, and so the ancient Hebrew sages say that upon Hiel's sons' deaths Achav felt obligated to have the funeral at his palace in Shomron and it was at this somber event that Elijah arrived to pay his respects. Is that actually the case? I cannot say with certainty, but the circumstances easily accommodate that viewpoint and there is no reason to simply dismiss it because it's not written in the Bible. This explanation is first recorded well before the time of Christ, so it does have some veracity. The only reason I even offer it is because as I've taught you in prior lessons, there are always reasons and causes behind the actions of all of our Bible characters. And these reasons and causes were logical and rational and in tune with the societal customs and traditions of the era. The authors and editors of the books of Bible didn't usually include such details because to the audience they thought they were writing on behalf of, these details were generally common knowledge. If today in one of my lessons I said that I drove from Cocoa Beach, Florida to New York City I wouldn't also have to explain to my listeners that I used an automobile, or that I had to purchase gasoline to fuel it, or that I drove on roads paved with asphalt and concrete; such is common knowledge. But 1000 years from now, these details might be needed to help establish context.

Eliyahu's threat to King **Achav** is interesting on a couple of fronts: 1st, because it is but an application of the divine threat as issued in Moses' day in Deuteronomy 11:16, 17.

Deut. 11:16-17 CJB

¹⁶ But be careful not to let yourselves be seduced, so that you turn aside, serving other gods and worshipping them.

¹⁷ If you do, the anger of ADONAI will blaze up against you. He will shut up the sky, so that there will be no rain. The ground will not yield its produce, and you will quickly pass away from the good land ADONAI is giving you.

The 2nd front is that Elijah made it clear that he could, on his own authority, make the decision to shut up the skies and then to reopen them. And as we'll see this is no idle boast as that is what actually happened. Of course it was the Lord who directed him to do this, and the power was on loan from God to perform such a miracle. But this is the first indication we have of just how great and unparalleled of a career as a prophet that God intended for Elijah.

And 3rd is the matter of dew: dew is more than just a pretty decoration that shimmers on plant leaves and slightly dampens the soil. Dew in an arid climate was often critical in keeping crop plants watered and viable especially at times when no rain was falling. So the lack of both dew and rain indicated something of a catastrophic nature was about to happen that was bound to cause famine and death.

Now interestingly, this matter of a prophet having the divine authority and power to stop the rain from falling is going to repeat itself far into the future. The only difference is that Elijah stopped the rain on a relatively localized area, but this future prophet of the latter days will stop the rain worldwide. Listen to this passage in Revelation 11.

Rev 11:3-6 CJB

³ "Also I will give power to my two witnesses; and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, dressed in sackcloth."

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two menorahs standing before the Lord of the earth.

⁵ If anyone tries to do them harm, fire comes out of their mouth and consumes their enemies- yes, if anyone tries to harm them, that is how he must die.

⁶ They have the authority to shut up the sky, so that no rain falls during the period of their prophesying; also they have the authority to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

So here we see that the Lord will give the power to stop the rains to a prophet, two of them actually, who are identified as the famed 2 witnesses of the end times stories, and who appear during the coming time of the Great Tribulation. But what is even more interesting is the identity of these 2 witnesses. At least one of them becomes identified for us in the Book of the Prophet Malachi.

Malachi 3:23-24 CJB

²³ Look, I will send to you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of ADONAI.

²⁴ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; otherwise I will come and strike the land with complete destruction." [Look, I will send to you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of ADONAI.]

So what we have is that Elijah is going to return just before the Day of the Lord (the pouring out of God's wrath and the return of Messiah), and we have two witnesses appearing, and they will order the rain to stop during the entire period of their prophesying, which is 1260 days (or 3 ½ years).

But then we have this statement made by Yeshua in Luke 4:

Luke 4:24-26 CJB

²⁴ Yes!" he said, "I tell you that no prophet is accepted in his home town.

²⁵ It's true, I'm telling you- when Eliyahu was in Isra'el, and the sky was sealed off for three-and-a-half years, so that all the Land suffered a severe famine, there were many widows;

²⁶ but Eliyahu was sent to none of them, only to a widow in Tzarfat in the land of Tzidon.

So, let's put this together: we find out from no less than Christ that in 1st Kings, during the reign of King **Achav**, Elijah did not permit it to rain for 3 ½ years. Next we find out in Malachi that just before the end, Elijah will be returned to earth to announce the coming of the end. Then in Revelation we find out that just before the end 2 witnesses will appear, and they will stop the rain for.....3 ½ years! Obviously 1 of the 2 witnesses is Elijah, and he will do in the end times essentially the same thing that he did in **Achav's** day: stop the rain for exactly 42 months.

Patterns, people, patterns. If God is the God who never changes, then neither does His patterns. In fact it is widely believed, and I think it is probably the case, that the other witness is Moses himself. Notice that another thing that the two witnesses will do in the end times is turn waters into blood and to call down every kind of plague. And who does that bring to mind? That was what Moses did to Egypt. So it seems pretty likely that Moses will be that other prophet.

Back to our story in 1st Kings 17. Verse 2 says that the Lord told **Eliyahu** (which literally means “El is yah”, or dynamically “God is Yehoveh”) that now that he has given **Achav** the bad news, he needs to flee the vicinity and hide. Specifically he is to go east and hide in the Wadi K’rit near the Jordan River. At this time Elijah is in Samaria, so east of him is hill country and eventually the Jordan River. But did he cross over and go even further east? Or did he merely go east from Samaria and stay on the west side of the Jordan? This isn’t clear, but most scholars believe he went into the Transjordan area and hid there. This would put him further from King **Achav** and where the king had less influence, and so Elijah would be much more difficult to find.

Wherever he was to hide, he was to stay away from people, and he was also not near any food source. So the Lord commanded the ravens to feed him. To command the ravens means to reprogram their instincts. It means to make what would be unnatural for ravens to do seem natural to them. In this case it was to deliver food morsels (fit for a human) to Elijah.

Now the later Rabbis struggled with this because they felt that the idea of ravens bringing food to Elijah was too problematic. First, it sounds too improbable that ravens would bring edible food to a human. Second, ravens are classified as unclean birds. Would God use an unclean creature to bring sustenance to perhaps the greatest and holiest prophet ever known (especially a Levite priest)? And, since ravens will eat almost anything, it’s unimaginable to the Rabbis that the food the ravens delivered would have been kosher. Thus they decided that since the Hebrew word for ravens is **oreb** and with a little stretching that it could be interpreted as Arab, that this would indicate that Arab trade merchants, and not scavenger birds, fed Elijah. Other Rabbis said that the word is meant to designate a nearby town called **oreb**, (which no one had ever heard of) and so the townspeople of **oreb** fed him. None of this is satisfactory and only seeks to harmonize Rabbinic Judaism and its strict rules of Kashrut with the Biblical passage.

The thing is, these Talmudic traditions ignore the intended miraculous nature of the ravens feeding Elijah. Even more, one can only imagine how the level and intensity of Elijah’s faith

and trust in Yehoveh must have increased as a result of such an unimaginable miracle! He was going to need the ultimate faith of which a human is capable to do what God had planned for him. So his time in hiding was much more than mere waiting; it was preparation. In fact, there is probably a message to Elijah (and us) in God's choice of ravens just because they **are** unclean birds. We'll see why in a moment.

Of course **Eliyahu** would also need water, so the Lord had him go to live by a wadi. Now a wadi is typically a dry riverbed, but not always. It is sometimes a MOSTLY dry river bed that has a small brook that flows through it during much if not all of the year. That is the kind that is contemplated here. But by being at this brook, when the coming drought took full hold, Elijah would among the first to know as it dried up. And sure enough in time verse 7 says that the water course dries up and goes underground due to the lack of rain.

Once the drought had taken hold and its effects were bearing down hard on the people, the Lord told **Eliyahu** to go to a place called **Tzarfat**. This was a village in Sidon, the main city in the nation of Tyre. I told you at the beginning of our lesson to watch for this because Sidon of Tyre was Jezebel's hometown and it was located within her father, **Ethbaal's** kingdom! Elijah was instructed by God to go and live with a widow who resided in **Tzarfat**. God had prepared this widow for this purpose. But take notice: this widow was a **gentile** woman. And according to Jewish Tradition, that made her unclean. Naturally the Rabbis couldn't tolerate this prospect, so they decided that she wasn't really a gentile after all, but rather she was the widow of the Jewish prophet **Amittai**. Even more that she was the mother of the prophet Jonah! Of course all that is pure fantasy, but it sure seemed to fix the problem for them.

So Elijah was first fed by unclean birds and he next went to live and be fed in the home of a gentile widow! Naturally this is all indicative of what would be so explosively manifest in Yeshua's day, that gentiles would be intimately involved in, and be joint beneficiaries with the Hebrews of God's plan of redemption; something that the vast bulk of the Jewish leadership couldn't fathom let alone accept.

But Elijah didn't know who this widow was, and the widow didn't consciously know that she would host God's prophet, so somehow they had to discover one another. When Elijah arrived at the city gates he saw a widow gathering sticks. He would have known she was a widow by her widow's garments, and understood her condition of poverty by the puny sticks she was gathering to create a modest cooking fire. He asked her for a drink of water and she complied. Then he asked her to bring him some bread to eat and she said that she had none. All she had was a small amount of flour (ground grain) and a little bit of olive oil. In fact, she explained that once she used the sticks she was gathering to create a cooking fire, she would cook the tiny

remainder of flour, she and her son would eat the bread, and then they would starve to death because that was the last of their provisions.

It wasn't primarily because she was poor that she would starve to death; it was because the drought Elijah called down from heaven affected the weather all the way to the Mediterranean Sea and that included the nation of Tyre. There was simply no food except for those who had enough funds to pay exorbitantly for what limited supplies there were, and that leaves a poor widow and her family without. Interestingly in her reply to Elijah she said, "As Yehoveh your God lives...", meaning that she knew of the God of Israel and she knew that Elijah was an Israelite.

His response to her sets the stage for another miracle. He tells her not to fear; to go ahead and do as he asked; bake a small loaf for him to eat, and once he is served bake more for herself and her son. But, he says, Yehoveh God of Israel will reward her for her obedience and kindness by supernaturally assuring that no matter how much flour she takes out of her little flour jug, it will never become empty. At least not until the rains start again and crops begin to grow and the nation's food supply is back to normal.

She believed **Elijah**, did as he asked, and sure enough she and her family never went hungry during the entire 3 ½ year period of the drought. But this also speaks loudly of this gentile woman as having but the simplest of faith in the Word of the Israelite God as spoken by His prophet and it was sufficient to be delivered from death. She gave up the familiar, the comfortable, even the rational and the logical, as well as the certainty of what she had grown up with within her own culture and did it all on faith; faith in the God of Israel. She trusted Yehoveh with her and her son's lives. And again, it is critical to grasp that this was a gentile woman, not a Hebrew. And now we understand that part of the Lord's preparation of this woman to receive God's prophet and God's Word was the faith that the Lord had planted within her, unbeknownst to her. What could be a clearer picture of how anyone (especially a gentile) would become a Believer in the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, beginning 9 centuries into the future? The simplest faith in the Messiah was sufficient for deliverance, and it mattered not whether one was Jew or gentile.

In fact, let's return for a moment to Luke 4 to see how well what we just studied plays into a teaching of Yeshua.

Luke 4:24-26 CJB

²⁴ Yes!" he said, "I tell you that no prophet is accepted in his home town.

²⁵ It's true, I'm telling you- when Eliyahu was in Isra'el, and the sky was sealed off for three-and-a-half years, so that all the Land suffered a severe famine, there were many widows;

²⁶ but Eliyahu was sent to none of them, only to a widow in Tzarfat in the land of Tzidon.

The point of this passage is that God could have sent Elijah to any number of Hebrew widows in the Land of Israel but instead chose to send him to a gentile widow in a foreign nation who weren't His people. Why? Because the northern kingdom of Israel was now so perverted and apostate that this greatest prophet of God was not welcome in his own nation. Is that not what we see happen with Yeshua and later his disciples and apostles? They were welcomed by gentiles in foreign nations, but were driven out of synagogues and Jewish villages in the Holy Land. Truly Elijah was a shadow of things to come on a number of levels.

But then a terrible thing happens; this faithful widow's son takes ill and dies. Some Christian scholars and Rabbis have tried to say that the boy's breathing was merely shallow enough that it couldn't be detected and so he wasn't dead. But that is not true; saying that his breath left him or that his breathing stopped was just a standard saying that meant death. It wasn't a technical medical report of his cardiovascular system. The idea that ancient people couldn't tell the difference between shallow breathing and a dead person is ludicrous. They dealt with death on a more regular basis and more intimately than any modern person of the Western culture will, except perhaps for a doctor or nurse. The boy was clearly dead.

But then the distraught woman made a startling accusation towards Elijah; she wants to know why Elijah would come to her, accept her kindness, and then bring down God's wrath on her for her sins. In other words, she was well aware of her sins but until now God hadn't been near enough for Him to be aware of her sins (remember, it was believed then that gods were territorial, so Yehoveh lived in Israel). But now that God's prophet ***Eliyahu*** was here in Sidon, it drew attention to her and her family. The result was that God saw her sins and is now punishing her for her sins by killing her son. Of course what we are witnessing coming from this woman of simple faith in (but little knowledge of) God is pagan thoughts and superstitions so prevalent and accepted in her day.

And this is why I say without ceasing that simple faith is good enough for salvation, but maturing of the Believer must commence immediately or else those carnal and pagan thoughts that we have lived all of our days before we knew Messiah will get all mixed up with God's truth. We MUST begin to study His Word.....from the beginning in Genesis....and apply and practice those teachings to our lives or we will live in the same current condition of this widow of Tzarfat. Confused, but certain of what we think to be the truth, even though it is not.

Elijah grabbed the dead boy, took him upstairs to his bed, laid him in it and in earnest prayer asked the Lord if it was He who killed this child (which was the boy's mother's explanation). Then He prayed that the Father would return life to this child. We have to remember here that this is far more than merely a sad death of a boy. Without a son to care for her later in life, this widow faced the most horrendous of prospects. Thus for God to kill her son was indeed not a punishment for her in the sense of her experiencing the excruciating pain of loss of her child, but rather it was dooming her to a life of depravation and bitterness when she became too old to care for herself and had no son to watch over her. It also meant an end to her deceased husband's life essence that was thought to permeate through sons. So her torment was far greater than the sadness of the premature death of an innocent child.

As with the case of the man born blind as mentioned in John 9, the death of the widow's son was not meant as the medium of punishment for the woman's sins. Rather it was allowed so that the Lord could demonstrate His glory and reveal His works through it. So Yehoveh did something unbelievable; for the first recorded time in the Bible, we have bodily resurrection from the dead. And curiously it was a **gentile** boy who was raised by the prayers of a Hebrew prophet and the power of the living God who gives life.

The boy, now back to life, was handed over to his relieved mother. Elijah, seeking no credit, merely says, "See? Your son is alive". By means of this miracle we see Elijah as a kind of forerunner of Messiah Yeshua. But we also can imagine the incredible leap in faith that must have occurred not only in the half-heathen woman of **Tzarfat** who possessed nothing but a mustard seed's worth of faith, but also in **Eliyahu**. He was going to need it.

The chapter ends with the woman moving from half-heathen to fully transformed. She expresses her now implicit faith in Yehoveh God of Israel as the true God who speaks only the truth. As the only God who can bring life from the dead.

We'll continue with Elijah's adventures next time as we take up chapter 18.

