

1 Kings 17:1-16

January 8, 2023



SCRIPTURE

17 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe^[a] in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

2 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: **3** “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. **4** You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”

5 So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. **6** The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.
Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath

7 Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. **8** Then the word of the LORD came to him: **9** “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” **10** So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” **11** As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

12 “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

13 Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. **14** For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.’”

15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. **16** For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.



COMMENTARY

This section describes the clash between the prophet Elijah and King Ahab of Israel. One of the greatest missionary themes in Old Testament theology was the witness of God's miraculous signs. The best literary pattern exemplifying this theology is Jethro's visit to Moses in the wilderness (Ex 18). Jethro heard of God's great deeds of deliverance (Ex 18:1) and visited God's people and learned even more about God's great works (Ex 18:8). He praised God (Ex 18:10-11) and then joined in a fellowship meal with God's people (Ex 18:12). These were the same signs that drew Rahab to the Lord (Jos 2:8-13) and threw other Canaanites into despair.

In biblical history, there are four extended periods of witness with great signs and wonders: (1) the exodus and conquest; (2) the age of Elijah and Elisha; (3) the first coming of Christ and the growth of the early church; and (4) the end of history with the miraculous wonders of the book of Revelation. In the age of Elijah and Elisha, faith in Yahweh clashed with one of the most dangerous false deities it ever faced, Baal-melkart of Tyre. The power encounter between these two rival religions was the setting for the miraculous works of these great prophets.

17:1 The HCSB suggests that Elijah was one of the settlers in Gilead. This raises the possibility that he was a non-Hebrew settler, since a Hebrew was typically described in terms of his tribe and family. Elijah's rustic appearance also set him apart as someone different. He was to announce to one of the most powerful kings in the region that God would send a devastating drought against the land.

17:2-3 The location of the Wadi Cherith is not clear. Some authorities identify it with the Wadi Qelt that passes just south of Jericho. Some translations place it east of the Jordan River, apparently taking the words where it enters the Jordan (lit "which is facing/before the Jordan") as being equal to "facing the Jordan from the east." If we permit Elijah's move eastward from delivering his oracle in Israel to include a great deal of southeasterly movement, the Wadi Qelt is possible.

17:4-7 In sign theology, miracles have meaning. God's miraculous provision of food for Elijah, at a time when God had cut off food for the nation, reminded any hearer/reader that God is the true provider of human needs. Unclean carrion birds (ravens) brought this food.

17:8-15 Among spiritual leaders in Israel's history, Elijah stands alongside Moses and Samuel in importance and influence. In a time when Ahab and Jezebel stubbornly led Israel away from God, Elijah confronted them with God's words and struggled to lead Israel to repentance and renewed faith.



As the centuries passed, Elijah became the symbol of all prophets; and as such, he appeared with Moses at Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). Elijah's miraculously being taken into heaven (2 Kings 2:11-12) and Malachi's prophecy (Mal. 4:5) made some people speculate Jesus or John the Baptist might be Elijah (Matt. 16:14; John 1:21). Luke 1:17 and Matthew 11:13-14 indicate that the coming of John the Baptist fulfilled Malachi's prophecy about Elijah.

In 1 Kings 17, when Elijah's water source dried up, the word of the Lord came to him as it had before. Elijah had a living relationship with God and a strong prayer life (Jas. 5:17). Elijah heard God's voice because he was listening for Him as part of his daily walk with God. God's command to Elijah must have struck him as unusual because it sent him to Zarephath, a land dominated by Baalism. In a town whose inhabitants worshiped Baal, the Lord would care for His prophet by working a miracle through the faith of a widow, proving Baal to be nothing. When he arrived, Elijah saw a widow there picking up firewood and asked her to bring him a drink and then bread. We may view hospitality as good manners or a generous custom, but the people of the biblical world saw the practice of hospitality as a sacred obligation. Often a person providing hospitality did far more than was requested, but Elijah knew the severe drought had produced a devastating famine and the woman might be reluctant to part with food. Elijah's words also created the opportunity for God to work a miracle.

The widow told Elijah she had only a handful of flour and a little oil left with which to prepare bread. She intended to build a fire with the sticks she had gathered, prepare a last meal of bread for herself and her son, and then wait to die of starvation. As food supplies dwindled in the town, she knew those who distributed the food would overlook a vulnerable widow and her son. She saw only death in her future.

Elijah urged the widow not to be afraid. He then asked her to do something incredibly difficult; make bread for him first then some for her son and herself. The widow had introduced Elijah's God into the conversation. If the widow followed Elijah's instructions, God would ensure that her jar of flour and jug of oil would never be empty until God brought back rain to the land. If she demonstrated faith, she and her son would have enough to eat until the drought and famine ended. God's promise challenged the widow to believe and trust God with her future.

On hearing God's promise, the widow obeyed, not because she and her son had no better option, but out of faith in God. God responded to her faithful action by keeping His promise. As long as the drought lasted, Elijah, the woman, and her son had enough to eat. God had defeated Baal. While those in Sidon and Israel slowly starved, God miraculously provided for His prophet, a widow, and her son. The Lord alone deserves worship.



MAIN POINT

When we give God our everything, we aren't risking anything—we're gaining everything!

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever felt as though your basic needs wouldn't be met? What caused this fear?

How has God provided for you when it seemed like your circumstances were working against you?

We may not know what it is like to not have our most basic needs met, but we can all understand the fear of uncertainty when life takes an unexpected turn. These moments make us think we need to protect our resources, don't they? These unexpected turns cause us to hold everything tighter, thinking God surely wouldn't expect us to give now. But God wants us to depend on Him and seek His wisdom—even in our crises. He promises to provide for His children. Today we'll focus on God's giving through faith. The story of the prophet Elijah and a widow in 1 Kings 17 reveals how God provides for the needs of those whose faith is in Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 17:1-7.

Which stands out to you in the first seven verses more: God's provision or earth's pain? Explain.

What did the Lord do for Elijah to demonstrate His faithfulness and care?

King Ahab reigned for twenty-two years and proved to be the most ungodly king Israel ever had. His wife, Jezebel, led him to try to make worshipping Baal the official religion of Israel. As a prophet of Israel, Elijah confronted Ahab and announced a terrible drought being sent by God. During the drought, God miraculously cared for Elijah and others.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 17:8-14.



Elijah was willing to go where God called him. What can we learn from his obedience?

Why do you think the widow questioned Elijah's instructions?

In what circumstances are we tempted to question what God calls us to do?

Compare Elijah's provision to the provision of the Israelites in Exodus 16:8,12-13. How did the Lord exceed expectations in both situations?

Zarephath in Sidon was an area where the false god Baal was worshiped extensively. This led many to (mistakenly) believe the God of Israel had no authority in this region.

How do we place limits on our expectations of God's sovereignty and authority? Why do we do this?

We often have no trouble believing God is powerful and created and governs the world but struggle to believe He can meet our physical needs. Why is this?

Reread Elijah's request in verse 13. How would you respond if a man you had never seen asked you to feed him before your own child when you had meager rations?

When was a time God led you to do something that didn't make sense in the moment? What happened?

Sensing fear in the widow's response, Elijah told her not to be afraid. God's promise was a sufficient supply of flour and oil during the drought—enough to feed her, her son, and Elijah. The widow did not question Elijah about how God might fulfill His promise to her, but she obeyed the prophet's instructions. God miraculously ensured the woman's food supply never ran out as long as the drought endured. To receive God's promises, we too must respond in faith.

 **ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 17:15-16.**

How do these verses illustrate that faith must be active, not passive? What are some ways God provides that require us to be active?

What evidence do you have that God keeps His promises to those who obey?

What instructions might God give to someone needing assistance today?



The widow acted on God's promise that Elijah had spoken to her, and God kept His word. When we trust God to fill our needs, we may not experience the same kind of miracle the widow did, but we know He will be faithful. We first must risk acting on our faith and doing what the Lord leads us to do. We can be confident He will take care of us in His own time and in His own way.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is the biggest obstacle that stands in the way of your trusting God fully?

How has God demonstrated His faithfulness to you?

What changes would take place in your life this week if you were to truly give God your everything?

What example does believing in and trusting God's provision set for our unbelieving friends?

PRAYER

As a group, thank God that He is always trustworthy to provide for your needs. Ask Him to help you remain obedient to Him so that your faith and generosity will reveal His power in your lives.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of the life of Elijah.

January 15, 2023 --- 1 Kings 17:17-24

