

FIRST KINGS

Chapter 17

Elijah Fed by Ravens

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe 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 ordered the ravens to feed you 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.

Ch 17–2Ki 2 This section is not so much the history of King Ahab and of his successors, but rather a record of the prophet Elijah. It opens with an account of what he did before, during, and after a severe drought (chs 17–18). After announcing the drought and going into hiding, Elijah was miraculously kept alive (17:1–7). Directed by the Lord, Elijah spent the remainder of the drought in the Phoenician city of Zarephath, where he performed two miracles (17:8–24).

Ch 17 Mel: “Understand how many great and good works this first duty which the woman performed in feeding the prophet produced and consider the mountain of rewards she received. For not only was the family fed, but it was instructed by the prophet concerning the true worship of God and eternal life and in many ways it was protected against the devil. The son was raised from the dead and became a disciple of the prophet, and he doubtlessly utilized his services for the church later on. Even small insignificant works are adorned with rewards far greater than is owed” (Chem, *LTh* 2:571–72). (TLSB)

17:1 *Elijah.* Elijah’s name (meaning “The LORD is my God”) was the essence of his message (18:21, 39). He was sent to oppose vigorously, by word and action, both Baal worship and those who engaged in it. (CSB)

Heroic prophet of 1Ki. To counteract the evils of Ahab’s reign, God raised up one of the most arresting figures among the OT prophets. In “spirit and power,” Elijah was to foreshadow One besides whom there was none greater “among those born of women” (Lk 1:17; 7:24–28). As Moses was the type of the Prophet (Dt 18:15–22), so Elijah prefigured the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist (Mal 4:5–6; Mk 9:4–5). He suddenly appeared on the scene; he vanished from sight even more mysteriously (2Ki 2:11). (TLSB)

from Tishbe in Gilead. See NIV text note. Gilead was in the northern Transjordan area. The precise location of Tishbe is unknown. (CSB)

Native of Tishbe, obscure village in Transjordanian Gilead, mentioned only in connection with Elijah. (TLSB)

Gilead. Northern Transjordan area. (TLSB)

whom I serve. Lit. “before whom I stand,” a technical expression indicating one who stands in the service of a king. Kings and priests in Israel were supposed to be anointed to serve as official representatives of the Lord, Israel’s Great King, leading Israel in the way of faithfulness to the Lord and channeling his covenantal care and blessings to them. Since the days of Jeroboam the northern kingdom had not had such a priest (12:31), and its kings had all been unfaithful. Now, in the great crisis brought on by Ahab’s promotion of Baal worship, the Lord sent Elijah (and after him Elisha) to serve as his representative (instead of king and priest), much as Moses had done long ago. The author of Kings highlights many parallels between the ministries of Elijah and Moses. (CSB)

neither dew nor rain. The drought was not only a divine judgment on a nation that had turned to idolatry, but also a demonstration that even though Baal was considered the god of fertility and lord of the rain clouds, he was powerless to give rain (cf. Lev 26:3–4; Hos 2:5, 8). (CSB)

17:3–7 The Lord sent Elijah to an obscure location for safety and sustenance. (TLSB)

17:3 *Leave here.* With this command God withdrew his prophet from his land and people to leave them isolated from his word and blessings. The absence of the prophet confirmed and intensified the judgment. (CSB)

Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. The location of Kerith is uncertain. Perhaps it was a gorge formed by one of the northern tributaries to the Yarmuk River. (CSB)

17:4 *ravens to feed you there.* The Lord’s faithful servant Elijah was miraculously sustained beyond the Jordan (like Israel in the desert in the time of Moses) while Israel in the promised land was going hungry—a clear testimony against Israel’s reliance on Baal. The fact that Elijah was sustained in a miraculous way apart from living among his own people demonstrated that the word of God was not dependent on the people, but the people were dependent on the word of God. (CSB)

17:5 *east of the Jordan.* Lit, “on the face of the Jordan.” Location is uncertain. (TLSB)

17:1–7 Having predicted a drought to Ahab, the great prophet Elijah goes to the brook Cherith, where the Lord has ravens miraculously provide for him. In a wicked, harsh, and hostile world, God watches over those who are His. No matter how much everything may seem to be against us, the Lord is with us, a haven of everlasting love. • Heavenly Father, when all seems lost, remind us that You did not withhold Your only Son from us. In Jesus, the bread of life, You will give us all we need for this world and for the life to come. Uplift us with assurance of Your love and protection, in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

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 of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place 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 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 cake 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 gives 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. ¹⁷ Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. ¹⁸ She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?” ¹⁹ “Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. ²⁰ Then he cried out to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” ²¹ Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!” ²² The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. ²³ Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!” ²⁴ Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”

17:8-16 Through Elijah, the Lord miraculously provides food for a widow in Zarephath. This story illustrates God's never-ending goodness. He daily and richly provides for all our needs, blessings us far beyond what we deserve or what we ask. (TLSB)

17:9 *Zarephath of Sidon.* A coastal town located between Tyre and Sidon in the territory ruled by Jezebel's father Ethbaal (16:31). Elijah is commanded to go and reside in the heart of the very land from which the Baal worship now being promoted in Israel had come. (CSB)

Small coastal town of Phoenicia between Tyre and Sidon. (TLSB)

Zaraphath was outside of Israel, near Sidon, the hometown of Queen Jezebel. Would someone from the idolatrous land really provide for a prophet of the Lord? Could a woman (a widow at that) feed another mouth during a famine? (PBC)

widow. Jesus' only excursion beyond the borders of ancient Israel was "to the region of Tyre and Sidon," where He, too, met a Syrophenician woman of great faith (Mk 7:24–30). (TLSB)

I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food. Elijah, as the bearer of God's word, was now to be sustained by human hands, but they were the hands of a poor widow facing starvation (v. 12). She was, moreover, from outside the circle of God's own people (cf. Lk 4:25–26)—in fact, she was from the pagan nation that at that time (much like Egypt earlier and Babylon later) represented the forces arrayed against God's kingdom. (CSB)

He had made provisions to take further care of His prophet, and would in due time influence her heart to do His bidding. (Kretzmann)

17:10 *So he went.* Elijah's reliance on the Lord demonstrated the faith in the Lord that Israel should have been living by. (CSB)

WIDOW – Jesus refers to the widow of Zaraphath in Luke 4:26. There were many widows in Israel who, theoretically, could have provided for Elijah. But God pronounced judgment on His people's unbelief by sending His prophet to a Gentile woman. When God's own people worship idols instead of the Lord, then God sends His prophets and His blessings to others. (PBC)

GATE ... GATHERING STICKS – Odd place to gather firewood. "Stalks" could be intended (cf. Josh 2:6), as threshing floors were often near the city gate (cf. 22:10) (TLSB)

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Bring me a little water. Test of generosity. Cf Gn 24:17–20. (TLSB)

17:11 BRING ME, PLEASE A PIECE OF BREAD – The smallest-sized loaf, in the form of a cake or bun, being understood, as such were baked in hot ashes. (Kretzmann)

17:12 *As surely as the LORD your God lives.* Her oath in the name of the Lord was either an accommodation to Elijah, whom she recognized as an Israelite (see notes on 5:7; 10:9), or a genuine expression of previous knowledge of and commitment to the God of Israel. (CSB)

Vow to affirm the truth of her testimony. The widow recognized Elijah as an Israelite, and her expression may indicate frail faith in the true God. Though Zarephath lay outside of Israel, Israelite beliefs had influenced its people. Sidonians typically worshiped Eshmun and participated in the regional fertility cults. (TLSB)

HANDFUL OF FLOUR IN A JAR – The word *cad* is to be understood as implying an earthen jar; not a wooden vessel, or barrel of any kind. In the East they preserve their corn and meal in such vessels; without which precaution the insects would destroy them. Travelers in Asiatic countries abound with observations of this kind. (AC)

die. Drought was not restricted to Israelite territory, as the Phoenician historian Menander attests. (TLSB)

17:13 *first make a small cake of bread for me ... then make something for yourself and your son.* As a prophet, Elijah's words are the command of the Lord. The widow is asked to give all she has to sustain the bearer of the word of God. The demand to give her all is in essence the demand of the covenant that Israel had broken. (CSB)

To the word of comfort was added a demand, which must have been a sore test for the woman's faith. (Kretzmann)

17:14 *what the LORD, the God of Israel, says.* Elijah can tell the widow "Don't be afraid" (v. 13) because the demand of the covenant is not given without the promise of the covenant. The Lord does not ask more than he promises to give. (CSB)

17:15 *did as Elijah had told her.* By an act of faith the woman received the promised blessing. Israel had forsaken the covenant and followed Baal and Asherah in search of prosperity. Now in the midst of a pagan kingdom a widow realized that trustful obedience to the word of God is the way that leads to life. (CSB)

In spite of her poverty the widow of Zaraphath brought a cake of bread to God's prophet. In spite of her poverty the widow in Mark 12:42 brought to the Lord two mites, all that she had. Poverty does not excuse any Christian from worshiping the Lord. The offerings of Christians, rich and poor, are a demonstration of their love and trust. (PBC)

Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

17:16 *jar of flour was not used up.* God miraculously provided for this non-Israelite who, in an act of faith in the Lord's word, had laid her life on the line. He gave her "manna" from heaven even while he was withholding food from his unfaithful people in the promised land. The warning of Dt 32:21 was being fulfilled (cf. Ro 10:19; 11:11, 14). (CSB)

At the brook of Cherith, the Lord had sent ravens with food for Elijah; now He miraculously provides sustenance for the widow. In the religious crisis during the days of Elijah and Elisha, more "signs and wonders" witnessed to the power of the true God than in any period since the exodus (Ex. 7:3) (TLSB)

17:18 *Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?* The widow concluded that Elijah's presence in her house had called God's attention to her sin, and that the death of her son was a divine punishment for this sin. Although her sense of guilt seems to have been influenced by pagan ideas, both she and Elijah are confronted with the question: Why did the God who promised life bring death instead? (CSB)

The widow associates the prophet with preaching of condemnation. The prophets of northern Israel would certainly emphasize Law and condemnation, due to the people's unrepentance. (TLSB)

Her distress was so great that she was inclined to blame Elijah for the unfortunate turn of events. Her sensitiveness causing her to believe that her own sinfulness stood out all the more strongly by contrast with the holiness of the prophet. The woman supposed that in the same degree in which she was learning to acknowledge her sin God was taking account of it in order to punish her. (Kretzmann)

17:19 ON HIS BED – This emphasizes that Elijah was caring for the boy. (TLSB)

Instead of arguing with her, he took him out of her bosom, as she held him clasped tightly in her arms, and carried him up into the upper room of the house, and laid him upon his own bed, evidently deeply perplexed by this act of Jehovah and yet ready to wrestle for the boy's life in prayer in the loneliness of his chamber. (Kretzmann)

17:20 Elijah seems doubtful, yet prays for the boy's recovery. (TLSB)

It was a cry of deep distress over the fact that the tribulations of the famine were now increased by this new calamity, but also a prayer of faith that God surely would not permit death to hold the boy in these circumstances. (Kretzmann)

17:21 *stretched himself out on the boy three times.* The apparent intent of this physical contact was to transfer the bodily warmth and stimulation of the prophet to the child. Elijah's prayer, however, makes it clear that he expected the life of the child to return as an answer to prayer, not as a result of bodily contact. (CSB)

Stretched is a Hebrew verb, typically describing measurement, used in unique form. Elijah applies his life and prayer to the boy, his own body serving as the instrument of healing from the Lord. (TLSB)

let this boy's life return to him. Moved by a faith like that of Abraham (Ro 4:17; Heb 11:19), Elijah prayed for the child's return to life so that the veracity and trustworthiness of God's word might be demonstrated. (CSB)

17:22 HEARD – Elijah was a man of God who by the Word of the Lord and by intercessory prayer, revived the widow's son (cf 2 Kings 4:34; Acts 20:10). The Word made flesh commanded the dead by virtue of His own authority: "I say...arise" (Mark 5:41; Luke 7:14). (TLSB)

the boy's life returned to him. The first instance of raising the dead recorded in Scripture. This non-Israelite widow was granted the supreme covenant blessing, the gift of life rescued from the power of death. This blessing came in the person of her son, the only hope for a widow in ancient society (see Ru 1:11–12; 4:15–17; 2Ki 4:14; Lk 7:12). (CSB)

17:24 *you are a man of God.* The widow had addressed Elijah as a man of God previously (v. 18), but now she knew in a much more experiential way that he truly was a prophet of the Lord (see note on 12:22). (CSB)

the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth. God used this experience to convince the Phoenician widow that his word was completely reliable. Her confession was one that the Lord's own people in Israel had failed to make. (CSB)

17:17–24 When the widow's son dies, Elijah raises him back to life by God's power. Already in OT stories such as this, we see God's power over death, the height of which is Christ's glorious resurrection from the dead. For us and for our salvation, He has conquered sin, Satan, and death, opening the gates to everlasting life in heaven. • Lord of life and death, be with me in the hour of death with the assurance that comes from Your conquest over sin, Satan, and death itself. Amen. (TLSB)