

# Trust the Great Provider, not the Provision!

1 Kings 17

## Introduction

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There is one thing I want you to take away from our time together this morning: ***God loves and cares for those who love and trust him.*** Even in the face of trials we need to trust God the Great Provider not the provision. Keep that in mind as we look at our passage.

But first, let me set the scene for you.

David was king in the southern kingdom of Judah. In a few years he became king over the northern kingdom of Israel, establishing the united nation of Israel. Some 30 years later, David's son Solomon became king and built the temple in Jerusalem. The united nation of Israel does well for about 30 years until in 931 B.C. when the nation is split apart. Solomon's son Rehoboam became king in the south and Jeroboam son of Nebat became king in the north.

Over the next 58 years the northern kingdom goes through 6 kings each one worse than the last until we get to Ahab. Ahab is described as the worst of the worst. Ahab marries Jezebel who is a devout

Baal worshipper. Baal was the Canaanite god of rain. Together with her husband, Jezebel and Ahab begin a ruthless persecution of the children of God from their capital city of Samaria. They wanted to make Baal worship the state religion. Their intent was to eliminate God and replace Him with Baal worship.

God selects a man from Tishbe in Gilead to convey a message of judgment on Ahab and Jezebel. Tishbe is a mountainous region across the Jordan River from Samaria where most people struggle to survive as they make their living off the land. We don't know much about this man from the scripture. We don't know how old he is, or what training in the Scripture he might have had. But we can surmise that his parents were loyal to God because they named their son "Elijah" which means "Jehovah is God."

Imagine how Elijah felt, hearing the news of what is happening across the Jordan, and how the people are abandoning God to worship Baal.

So Elijah walks the 95 or so miles from Gilead to Samaria to give the message from God to Ahab, and that is where we pick up the story.

The story unfolds in four scenes but each scene has one central point: ***God loves and cares for those who love and trust Him!***

## 1) A Word for Ahab (v 1)

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Elijah bursts on the scene in 1 Kings 17:1 as he arrives in Samaria, the capitol city of the northern kingdom and headquarters of Baal worship under Ahab and Jezebel. Imagine this man from the country climbing the steps to the palace and walking up to King Ahab.

Here's Ahab living in a palace with the best clothes and food, living the good life worshipping Baal, and Elijah dressed in a crude camel hair coat with a big leather belt walks up declaring, ***“As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”***

With this prophecy Elijah is setting up a test for the whole nation of Israel to see. And the test is, “Who really is God?” Is it the God of the nation of Israel, or is it Baal? If Baal is really the god of rain he should be able to make it rain, but Elijah says not only will there be no rain but there won't even be any dew on the ground!

In delivering this prophecy to Ahab, Elijah was trusting God, the Great Provider.

## 2) A Wadi for Elijah (v 2-9)

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**VV 2-3.** <sup>2</sup> *The word of the LORD came to him, saying,*

<sup>3</sup> *“Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide*

*yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.*

God tells Elijah to go to Cherith and he goes—immediately, no questions asked.

The word used for “hide” means to make yourself “absent from,” or “separate yourself from.” So God is not telling Elijah to run and hide, but to remove himself as God's messenger from the people. Removing the ministers of God's truth is a sure sign of God's disapproval and impending judgment.

**V 4.** <sup>4</sup> *“It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there.”*

God says drink from the brook. The Hebrew word used here is better translated wadi. A wadi is a ravine with a brook at the bottom. The water in a wadi typically only runs during the rainy season, and by now the drought has been going on for several months.

God says “ravens will provide for you.” Ravens are a member of the crow family, but much larger—with wingspans of 40”. These are big birds. They are carrion that feed off of dead and rotting flesh.

Again no questions from Elijah—he just accepts that what God has told him will come to pass.

I think it is also interesting that God says the ravens will provide for you ***there***. Meaning at this specific place known as the wadi Cherith. Not someplace

else, but right there is where God will command the ravens to provide for Elijah.

**V 5.** <sup>5</sup> *So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.*

Again, Elijah immediately obeys the Word of God, no questions asked!

**V 6.** <sup>6</sup> *The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook.*

As promised by God, the ravens brought him meat and bread in the morning and evening, and he drank from the brook.

There was no storing up of food for the week. The ravens brought enough food for that meal only. Elijah had to trust God that the ravens would show up every morning and every evening! Jesus' prayer in Matthew "give us this day our daily bread" is teaching the same lesson—to depend on God for our daily provision.

**V 7.** <sup>7</sup> *It happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.*

The water dries up after a while. "After a while" makes it sound as if it happened by chance, but this phrase carries the meaning of a specific time and could be translated "At the end of days." It means the water dried up on God's perfect timing.

**V 8.** <sup>8</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,*

**Then** (after the brook dried up) God gave new instructions to Elijah. We don't know how long it was between when the brook dried up and when the Word of God came to him this time, but Elijah waited for instruction from God. We don't see anything here that indicates he was up packing his bag getting ready to look for a new source of water or packing his bag getting ready to head out!

In all this time in Cherith, being fed by ravens and depending on the brook for water Elijah trusted in God, the Great Provider to keep His promise!

### **3) A Widow for Elijah (v 9-16)**

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**V 9.** <sup>9</sup> *"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."*

Sidon is outside Israel in Gentile territory. In fact, it is where Jezebel is from—the headquarters of Baal worship!

**V 10.** <sup>10</sup> *So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink."*

So Elijah immediately obeys and heads off to Zarephath. Once again no questions from Elijah, he simply packs his bag and heads out toward

Zarephath which is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea some 110 miles across a desert and a mountain range, from Cherith.

When Elijah gets to the city gate there is woman gathering sticks and he asked her for a drink.

**V 11.** <sup>11</sup> *As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand.”*

<sup>12</sup> *But she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.”*

She must have recognized Elijah as a man of God. She explains that she is gathering the sticks so that she can prepare the last meal for herself and her son, and then die. Apparently the drought and famine were very severe. Widows normally relied on the generosity of others to survive, but in her case there was no one to help her and her son. She had lost all hope and was preparing herself and her son to die.

**VV13-16.** <sup>13</sup> *Then Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring it out to me, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son.*

<sup>14</sup> *“For thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD*

*sends rain on the face of the earth.’”*

<sup>15</sup> *So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days.*

<sup>16</sup> *The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.*

She did exactly as Elijah requested, and just as God promised the flour and oil never ran out. Mind you, the flour and oil didn't show up in a big Costco-sized barrel. There was just enough flour and just enough oil for each day. One day at a time they had to trust in God for the provision. And it says they ate for *many* days.

In all this time in Zarephath with the widow depending on the daily ration of flour and oil, Elijah trusted in God, the Great Provider to keep His promise!

#### **4) A Weeping Widow (v 17-24)**

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**V 17.** <sup>17</sup> *Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.*

Wow. This woman's husband is dead. She doesn't seem to have any family nearby to help her. It's just her and her son. She no doubt had counted on her son to help care for her, to provide for her, in her

old age. Now her precious son, the one person she shared her desperate life with is gone.

**V 18.** <sup>18</sup> *So she said to Elijah, “What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!”*

The widow blamed her son’s death on Elijah. She suggested that he came to punish her for her own sin by putting her son to death. It is ironic that she accuses the person she recognized before as a man of God, the one person who saved her and her son from starving to death, of then wanting to kill her son!

**V 19.** <sup>19</sup> *He said to her, “Give me your son.” Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed.*

Elijah doesn’t rebuke her or defend himself. He simply says, “Give me your son.” Elijah took the boy from the woman’s bosom (probably a small child for her to be carrying him), carried him upstairs where he was living, and laid him on his own bed.

**V 20-23.** <sup>V20</sup> *He called to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?”*

<sup>21</sup> *Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, “O LORD*

*my God, I pray You, let this child’s life return to him.”*

<sup>22</sup> *The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived.*

<sup>23</sup> *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 is alive.”*

Elijah calls out to God in prayer. He continues praying and lays himself on the boy three times as he implores God to let the boy’s life return to him. The Lord heard Elijah and he answered his prayer by reviving the boy from death. So Elijah gathers up the boy and brings him back downstairs to his mother, and says simply, “See your boy is alive.”

**V 24.** <sup>24</sup> *Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.”*

She recognized Elijah as a man of God when they first met at the city gate, she experienced the flour and oil not running out first hand, and now with her resurrected son she realizes not just that Elijah is a man of God, but that the word of the Lord is true! This Gentile woman surrounded by Baal worshippers accepted Elijah as a man of God, and now she knows that the word of God, not Baal is true!

## What we learn from this story:

Some of you may be thinking, “This is all well and good and it’s a nice story pastor, but that was 3,000 years ago, and this was Elijah, the prophet of God. How is this relevant to me?”

James says in 5:17,

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...* James 5:17-18 (NASB)

That means Elijah was a sinner with a sin nature. He made mistakes. He didn’t know everything there was to know about God, but he was faithful and obedient with what he did know.

Here are some things we should learn from our encounter with Elijah, a man like us, because Elijah demonstrated trust in God the Great Provider, not in the provision:

### 1) God will **judge** those who reject Him.

- It took the nation Israel only about 60 years to go from building the great Temple to God, to completely rejecting Him by turning to Baal worship.
- Judgment could have come at any time, do not be deceived if He should delay, there will be judgment.

### 2) God leads us **step-by-step** as we follow Him in **faith**. God does not grant fresh revelations until there has been compliance with those already received!

- Notice the pattern: God’s direction, followed by our compliance, precedes God’s provision.

### 3) God’s Word will **come to us**—we don’t have to go looking for it—but we do have to listen!

- God told Elijah to go to Samaria and confront Ahab.
- God told him to go to Cherith—drink from the water and have food provided by ravens.
- God told him to go to Zarephath and be provided for by the widow.

### 4) God expects us to **obey** without question.

- Elijah went and did as God commanded when he confronted Ahab, when he went to the wadi Cherith, and when he went to Zarephath to the widow.

### 5) God will allow our **faith** to be tested.

- Elijah was in seclusion in Cherith for three years depending on the ravens to bring him food—just enough for that meal, and for the water to keep running in the wadi.
- Both the widow and Elijah’s faith were tested every day as they depended on God’s provision of flour and oil—just enough for that day.
  - For the widow it was her last meal that she shared with Elijah. Her hope for life was directly tied to that little bit of flour and oil, yet she shared it with a stranger.

- The widow's faith was tested when her only son died and she turned him over to Elijah. What must she have been thinking? We have no recorded case of someone being brought back to life before this, yet she trusted her son to this strange man of God. Her supernatural faith bore a supernatural result.

**6) God will provide—just as He has promised!**

- God kept the rain from falling for 3-1/2 years.
- God kept the water running in the wadi and the ravens bringing food every morning and evening.
- God kept the flour and oil from running out—providing a fresh supply just enough for each day.

**7) God's provision may come from unexpected places!**

- Ravens. A wild unclean bird brought Elijah food twice a day every day for 3 years.
- The widow was an “unclean” Gentile yet she showed Elijah great hospitality, shared her last bit of food, and allowed him to live with her.

**What Action Should We Take?**

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It's time to get really practical. Think about yourself in terms of each of these seven points. Give yourself a grade. Are you doing pretty well? Ok. Do you

have some room for improvement? If so, then my challenge to you is think about what you can do in your life to trust in the God, the Great Provider, not the provision.

- God will **judge** those who reject Him. You may not be worshipping Baal, but are there things you are doing that are taking you away from God's best?
  - Do you worship your car, your bank account, or other possessions?
- God leads us **step-by-step** as we follow Him in faith.
  - Do you follow Elijah's pattern: God's direction, followed by our compliance, which precedes God's provision? Or do you take charge, try to provide yourself, and then as a last resort, seek God's direction?
- God's Word will **come to us**—we don't have to go looking for it! But we do need to listen.
  - Do you stop and listen for God's direction in your life?
- God expects us to **obey** without question.
  - Do you obey God's Word, or do you question His direction in your life?
- God will allow our **faith** to be tested. When the trials of life inevitably come, will they strengthen your faith, or make you question your faith? Will you draw closer to Him, or pull away?

- God may not ask you to walk back and forth across country by yourself, or go hide yourself in a ravine for three years, but are there times when you sense God wanting to have that really special time of quiet with you? Do you take the time? If you don't you might just miss out on God's next message for you!
- Sometimes we face trials of faith with others. Sometimes our faith is a testimony to an unbeliever as Elijah's was to the widow.
- God will **provide**—just as He has promised! Do you trust in God to provide just as He has promised—even if it means day-to-day?
  - In the midst of your hurried life, in the midst of your trials, do you trust in the Great Provider, or do you take charge and try to do for yourself?
- God's **provision** may come from unexpected places! Do you accept God's provision in your life even when it comes from unexpected places?
  - If we stay encased in our holy huddle of Christians, if we refuse to see God using others to complete His work, we stand a really good chance on missing out on some of the greatest blessings He will bestow!

Remember what I said when we started? ***God loves and cares for those who love and trust him.*** Even

in the face of trials we need to trust the Great Provider not the provision.

- We need God-reliance not self-reliance.
- We need God sufficiency not self-sufficiency.
- We need to trust in God the Great Provider, not the provision!

### **Close in prayer.**

*Father, in this story about Elijah we see over and over how your promises are true, that you love and care for those who love and obey you. Lord, as we leave here today I pray that each of us will consider whether we are doing things that take us away from your best. I pray that we listen and hear your direction, and that we will follow you in faith, step-by-step. Lord we rest in your promise, we know that your Word is true, and that you love and care for those who trust in you. Be with us this day I pray, as we trust in you God, the Great Provider. Amen.*