

1 Kings 17 • Various Tests of Faith

Introduction

God is going to use the same basic event – a drought – to communicate the same message to people of different faiths. It's not God's signs that will change, nor His Word and message accompanying them, but the different inclinations of each person's heart that will determine whether they accept or reject Him. As is so often the case with us today, we might get so caught up in figuring out how to deal with a life situation that we miss the greater message God is communicating through it. The purpose of coming through a great trial is not limited to just proclaiming how God met our needs during that time, but how we learned to make His Word a greater part of our life, thus growing spiritually from the situation. This chapter presents us with 3 different responses to the same sign and message, providing the opportunity to assess personally whether we're holding to what's most important in times of great testing and stress: God's Word.

¹Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "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."

²The word of the LORD came to him, saying, ³"Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁴It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there."

[Read v.1-4]

Q: We aren't provided with the whole dialogue that transpired between Elijah and Ahab, only the very end of it. What can be inferred from this final statement provided by Elijah?

A: Ahab had fallen so short of the right response to God's Word through Elijah that the only thing left was judgment. We can safely infer that Ahab has **completely** rejected God's Word through Elijah.

Q: Why do you suppose it's not necessary that their entire exchange be provided here?

A: As we've been reading 1 Kings, each king is qualified by when he began to reign, for how long, from what city, and to what degree he followed or rejected God's ways. In the case of all the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, every one of them is described as doing evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the sins of their fathers (typified by Jeroboam), and leading Israel into further sin. In Ahab's case we read in 16:33, "Thus Ahab did **more** to provoke the LORD God of Israel **than all the kings of Israel who were before him.**" So we know from the context of the chapters leading up to this that Ahab is unrepentant regarding his complete rejection of the One True God for false gods.

Q: What is the point of stating that the rain will be withheld "except by my word"? Is Elijah elevating himself in the eyes of Ahab?

A: Elijah is speaking God's Word, Who is stating to Ahab that the proof of Elijah's speaking **ALL** things in God's name will be when the drought that began through Elijah's prophetic utterance will in like manner come to an end. It's a test of faith for Ahab to prove the authenticity of the message.

Q: Why do you suppose Elijah needed to hide?

A: Most likely it's an indication of Ahab's wickedness and refusal to listen to God, so that as the drought took effect, Ahab's reaction was not to repent nor return to God, but to kill Elijah His messenger.

Q: If you were going to escape during a prolonged drought, would your first choice be east of the Jordan?

A: No, it is generally drier and sparser than the other side of the Jordan under normal circumstances, and even more so now.

Q: Is there a spiritual parallel to Elijah's life beyond the Jordan?

A: Most likely we're seeing how God provides for Believers even in the sparsest of circumstances, even under the harshest conditions of persecution and/or trial.

⁵So 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. ⁶The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook. ⁷It happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

⁸Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁹"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

¹⁰So 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." ¹¹As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand."

¹²But 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."

¹³Then 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. ¹⁴For 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.'"

¹⁵So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar

[Read v.5-9]

Q: Why do you suppose God told Elijah in advance that God would use ravens to supply Elijah's needs?

A: Ravens are specifically listed as an "unclean" animal. Elijah's normal inclination would be to avoid them under the usual circumstances.

Q: What seems to be especially miraculous about what God provided through the ravens?

A: God didn't provide ingredients to make meals, He provided ready-to-consume meals in prepared bread and cooked meat. It's a teaching of the completeness of God's works, demonstrating both His grace and love, and that what God provides is whole and complete.

Q: In what ways did Elijah's stay at Cherith test his faith?

A: It was obviously only suitable for a time – it was not God's end-destination for Elijah. When the brook dried up, Elijah had to continue to trust in God.

Q: Why might God's command to go to Zarephath be an even GREATER challenge to Elijah's faith?

A: He was hiding on the other side of the Jordan to begin with because of Ahab's desire to kill him. Zarephath was just outside of Sidon, the country over which Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was queen. Although it was just outside of the boundaries of northern Israel proper (Ahab's land), it was in the land belonging to his foreign wife, the **REAL** power devoted to false religion and false gods. So it would appear he was going to a place much **closer** to his persecutor than further.

[Read v.10-16]

Q: What is similar in the way the Lord sent Elijah to each of these places?

A: God told him when to go, where to go, and the means by which Elijah's needs would be met.

Q: What is different upon his arrival at Zarephath vs. Cherith?

A: Elijah is met with a test of faith of his own. Unlike the ravens, the widow does not appear to have what Elijah needs.

Q: How does Elijah pass his own test of faith while passing along that test to the widow?

A: There's enough for God to use and supply their needs, even though appearances would indicate otherwise. Elijah is going to have to take **God** at His Word while the widow is going to have to accept Elijah as a **man** of God's Word.

Q: How would you characterize God's provision at both Cherith and Zerephath?

A: God did not supply an abundance, but rather exactly what was needed on a day-by-day basis. Faith had to work on both the macro level ("God will always take care of me") and the micro level ("God will take care of my needs today").

Q: What could all of this represent spiritually?

A: That even in times of spiritual drought or great oppression, God's Word (bread) and anointing through the Spirit (oil) will be supplied by Him to Believers according to their need.

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of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.

¹⁷Now 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. ¹⁸So 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!"

¹⁹He 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. ²⁰He 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?"

²¹Then 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." ²²The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived.

²³Elijah 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."

²⁴Then 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."

[Read v.17-24]

Q: What do v.17-18 reveal about the internal spiritual condition of the woman?

A: She consciously recognizes that there is unresolved sin in her life for which she expects at some time to have to make a spiritual accounting. She believes that having come into close contact with a messenger of righteousness that her own unrighteousness is suffering the consequences.

Point: *It's important to note that not every person is "blind" or "ignorant" of their sin. In fact, it's probably a more common reality that the truth is always bubbling just below the surface for most people. Often the real issue hindering them is not knowledge of sin, but not taking the actions they've known all along would restore them to the right path. That's really why a test of "faith" is not about what you know but what you do.*

Q: Why do you suppose God allowed this tragedy to happen?

A: The woman's heart regarding God's Word and messenger were not changed by the daily sign of the food never running out. Her faith may have went as far as to believing those signs were from God, but it didn't go so far as to allow them to believe and confirm God's Word.

Point: *This is the problem with seeking signs – it's not a complete work in and of itself but still requires faith to be applied to the message **accompanying** the signs. If the message is ignored, the signs are of no personal value.*

Q: What is the contrast of faith exhibited by the 3 main characters Elijah, Ahab, and the woman?

- Elijah took God at His Word at every instance.
- Ahab rejected God's Word and sought to erase the message by eliminating the messenger.
- The woman initially accepted God's messenger but reject His Word through Him, finally accepting both in the end.

Overall Application

- *Have you noticed that in every instance where God has sent a person or group into the wilderness or during times of great scarcity (spiritual OR material), that He always provides for their needs? How does this contrast with our own faith in such times?*
- *Do we think we need to get out of the wilderness as quickly as possible, or do we allow that it's God's will that sets the place and time of duration of the testing of our faith? How well do you consider that the "wilderness" is exactly where He wants you?*
- *How do we treat God's Word? Is it more like Elijah, Ahab, or the woman? To what degree do we seek to hear the more important message **behind** events in order to respond appropriately to God's Word?*

¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Epilogue

[Read James 5:16-18]

Q: What does James seem to be saying about the example of Elijah?

A: That the things done through him were not the result of a special gift or dispensation from God as much as they were the result of an ordinary man pursuing (and achieving) God's standards of righteousness. God was able to work through him because of his pursuit of living according to God's will and ways.

Q: How is this an example to us personally?

A: The great things accomplished for God through our life come as the result of our normal, daily pursuit of living according to God's Word. "Faith" is present in direct proportion to "faithfulness".

Point: *There is no recorded "calling" of Elijah by God, no special background, no time of formal training recorded, nothing mentioned at all in Scripture until he simply "pops up" in 1 Kings 17. He might be one of the best biblical examples of how God uses those that simply follow Him from the heart and are available for "larger" things because of their daily faithfulness to the "small" things. Whereas worldly biographies paint a series of coincidences and "random" events that come together to elevate a person at a certain time and place, obedience to God's Word makes it possible for **HIM** to elevate **anyone** at any given time or place.*