

1 Kings 17-18

The Prophet Elijah predicts a drought

Without any introduction, Elijah the prophet shows up on the scene. He is from Tishbe in Gilead. Tishbe has to do with the idea of “settlers” which could indicate that he is a foreigner or an Israelite that lives on the frontier of the land. Gilead is on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Basically, this shadowy figure comes out of the wilderness and confronts the king and then disappears as the king tries to capture him. Elijah will become, in many ways the prototypical prophet and comes to represent all of the prophets. He will be mentioned in the last words of the Old Testament as coming before the Messiah appears and John the Baptist will be equated with Elijah. Just as John is a prophet that shows up in the region of the Jordan, speaking the truth and confronting the king (Herod Antipas – because of his evil wife).

Elijah goes to Ahab and proclaims that there will not be rain or dew in the land for the next several years. Why would God stop the rain? First, because was a curse that was specified in Deuteronomy. If the people and their king did not follow the laws of God then he would cause the sky not to rain upon their crops. The other reason is that it is a polemic against the god of Baal, whom Ahab and Jezebel introduced into Israelite society. Baal is the storm god, and therefore the god of fertility. They believed that he controlled the rains that come twice each year and provided fertility for the soil and growth of the crops. If Elijah can “shut off the water” then it is Elijah’s God who is really the one in control, not Baal. That is why this miracle is so important. God is eroding the faith of the people in Baal whom they had chosen to serve. They are suffering under the drought and asking the question, why doesn’t Baal provide the rain? Then they hear that the prophet of the LORD has called for the drought, just like Moses called for the plagues over Egypt. Who is in control? Who has real power? Who should we worship and trust with our lives and livelihoods?

God commanded Elijah to go and hide in a ravine by the brook Kerith and there the Lord would miraculously sustain him. Ravens brought him food – both bread and meat. This reminds us of the people in Israel in the wilderness – God is providing food for the prophet and sustaining him until his timing is complete. Just as Mana fell from heaven each morning so bread comes from the birds who fly in the heavens each morning and meat comes in the evening through the same delivery system. After some time, the brook dried up and the Lord provides a new means of supporting the prophet. He tells him to go at once to Zarephath, a small town just south of Sidon and there a widow will supply him with food. This must have taken great faith. Remember, Jezebel is the daughter of the king of the Sidonians. This is the heart of enemy territory. If Baal had any power, it should have been in Zarephath, but Baal is powerless to provide rain for his own people, much less Israel and he is powerless to thwart the care and feeding of the prophet of the LORD. The converse is of course true, God is powerful even in the midst of the land of the enemy to do what he pleases.

The widow is a person living on the margin. She is about to die since she has used up all of her resources. Elijah asks her for a favor – a drink of water and then to make him a small loaf of bread. She is resistant because there is nothing left, but the prophet tells her that her oil and flour will not run out until the drought is over. She believes and

does as Elijah says and he goes to stay with her. She is an example of a believing Gentile, who has been affected by living close to the people of God. Her simple believe and obedience stands in contrast with Israel, who should have believed and obeyed God and he would have provided for them as he had promised in the law.

In verse 17 the child of the widow becomes ill and died. The woman is angry with the prophet – how could God miraculously sustain their lives and then allow the child to die? Elijah takes the boy to his room and lays him on the bed. He then lays upon him three times and cries out to the Lord. The boy is raised from the dead and Elijah takes him to his mother. There is no stronger message against Baal, the god of fertility and life than the resurrection from the dead. The woman says now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is true. The Resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate testimony of the truth of the word of God and of his deliverance.

Chapter 18 – Elijah and Obadiah

Elijah is told to present himself to Ahab to end the drought. Obadiah, a godly man, who is the palace administrator, has been hiding 100 prophets of the LORD in two caves and providing food and drink for them. Clearly Jezebel is involved in a purge of the leaders of the worship of the LORD. Ahab and Obadiah are doing a survey of the land – each traveling in opposite directions – to find pasture to prevent the loss of the king's livestock. His horses and mules are essential for the protection of the nation. He is more concerned with the animals than he is with his people and with the prophets. He is trusting in Man's way and not God's way. Obadiah runs into Elijah on the road, and Elijah tells him to go and tell his master, Ahab, that Elijah is here. Obadiah reveals that the King has been looking nationally and internationally for Elijah and Obadiah is afraid that when he goes to get the king, the LORD will snatch Elijah away and he will be left with the wrath of the King. Elijah promises that he will be here to present himself to Ahab.

When Ahab arrived he called Elijah the Troublemaker for Israel, but Elijah turns it back on him and his dynasty. He sets the place of the confrontation and he summons the 400 prophets of Baal and Asherah who sit and eat at the table of Jezebel. The place is Mt. Carmel. The Carmel ridge sticks out like a little thumb into the Mediterranean Sea. It is close to Jezebel's power base, it is the place where the winds can bring the storms in from the sea and overlooks the once fertile valley below and the Kishon River. It is a place there an altar to God once stood but had been broken down and probably a worship center to Baal now existed. Ahab calls together an assembly of the people – probably the tribal leaders of the northern tribes. He also brings the 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah turns to the people and ask them how long they will waver between two opinions? If The LORD is God then follow him – if Baal is god then follow him. This is the question that is forever before us. Who is your god? And who's way will you follow? God spent three years softening up the people's hearts. He took away their prosperity, he destroyed their reserves, he allowed them to be weakened physically, and now he eroded their belief in the power of the god they had chosen over him. Now it is time to choose. Who will you follow? They year 2020 feels like the drought over the land of Israel. Our prosperity has been taken away, our reserves have been spent, we are weakened physically by a virus, and now our confidence in our politics, our economics, our other "gods" have been eroded away. It is now time to choose. Who will we turn to? The king can't save us, the only answer is to trust in God. To obey him and repent from our sin and rebellion against his law.