

1. If you have been studying the book of Kings with me to date, the good news is that this chapter is not another "this king was good and these other kings were bad" lecture. Instead we are going to get introduced to one of the most important figures in the Old Testament: Elijah. Of all the people listed in the Old Testament, Elijah's probably the third most important after Moses and David. In fact the bible speaks of Elijah's return prior to the coming of the Messiah. Jesus said that if we are willing to accept it, John the Baptist is the return of Elijah, (Matthew 11:14). Still John denied that he was the second coming of Elijah (John 1:21). If that isn't strange enough Elijah did appear with Jesus when He was transformed (probably seen in His heavenly form) before a handful of Jesus' disciples as stated in Matthew 17:3, Mark 9:4 and Luke 9:30-33.
  - a) The point is Elijah is important to religious Jews as the Old Testament predicts that he will return (see Malachi 4:5) prior to the Messiah (eternal king) ruling forever. He's important to Christians because he is one of two people from the Old Testament who in the Gospels actually appears with Jesus "transformed" as I said earlier. I believe Elijah will come again at the time of Jesus Second Coming as a witness for Jesus as implied in Revelation 11:3.
  - b) So if Elijah is so important, why does he first appear here in the middle of 1st Kings, and more importantly, why should I care about who Elijah is, and what was his significance?
    - i) My first answer is Elijah was God's response when the nation of Israel (that is, the Northern Kingdom) turned to idolatry. The historical point is the current king of the Northern Kingdom was named Ahab. He was worse than all the previous kings in that not only did he turn from God to worship an idol that we call Baal, but that this king and his wife, made Baal the official deity to be worshipped by the Israelites living there at this time. Think of Elijah as one who was raised up by God to lead His people back to Him despite their idolatry.
    - ii) OK John, too bad for those Israelites living roughly 3,000 years ago. I'm glad that they got someone sent by God to lead them back to Him. Now tell me why should I care about any of this stuff? Just as Elijah came once to lead the Israelites back to God, so Elijah will return a second time to lead the Israelites back to God. That's why Jesus referred to John the Baptist as having the power of Elijah although John himself denied he is the literal return of Elijah as promised in the book of Malachi.
    - iii) Think of it this way: The role of John the Baptist was to lead people to Jesus. The book of Malachi (4:5) predicts Elijah's literal return to lead people to the Messiah. Religious Jews today, when they celebrate the holiday of Passover, leave one chair empty for Elijah as part of the ritual.
    - iv) The key point is Elijah was sent the first time to show people that serving Baal was wrong and they should turn to God. Elijah's future role as was the role of John the Baptist was to lead Israelites back to God when they have turned from him. That's why just as John the Baptist pointed the way to Jesus First Coming, so will another appearance of Elijah be a sign to lead people to Jesus Second Coming.
2. OK John, this is all well and good if I happen to be from a Jewish background. However, most of us reading this lesson are Christians from non-Jewish backgrounds. What should we know about Elijah as it affects our lives as believers in Jesus? Great question. My answer is, consider what it is that Jesus called us to do: Go make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19). In other words, Jesus called us to be a witness for Him and lead people to Him and closer to Him. What was Elijah called to do? Lead people who have been called to serve God back to Him. Therefore, Elijah is more than one who is similar to John the Baptist, he is a model of what God calls us as Christians to do: be a witness for God and lead people to Him and closer to Him. That is why it is helpful for us Christians to study the life of the prophet Elijah and exactly what it is he does in the Old Testament.

3. All of that leads me to my lesson title: How God prepared Elijah for his role in the ministry and how that affects what God has called us to do as Christians. This lesson only covers the first of several chapters about the life of Elijah. The main purpose of his ministry does not begin until Chapter 18. In Chapter 17 (this lesson), we are going to focus on the steps that God took to train up Elijah to be a prophet of God and show what those lessons should teach us as Christians.
  - a) So are you saying that God calls all of us as Christians to be prophets? Of course not. What God desires of each of us as Christians is that we believe in Jesus as God and as one who is in charge of our lives and use our lives out of gratitude to make a difference for Him.
  - b) In this chapter, Elijah appears out of nowhere with almost no information given about his background. We don't know how or why Elijah was called to be a prophet. We are to just accept that He was and will be. We don't know why God called you and me to be a living witness for Him, we just are and part of our belief in Jesus is to accept that role.
  - c) Therefore, as we study the life of Elijah starting in this chapter, we are not instructed to focus on how or why he became a prophet, just to accept the fact that he is one. What we are to remember about this chapter is not the literal miracles that Elijah does as he is used by God, but the fact that this man was called to be a living witness for God just as you and I as Christians are called to be a living witness for Him. That's why God would like us to learn about the life of Elijah, as it is a good model for how we are to be a living witness for God in our own lives. With that said, it is time to start studying Chapter 17 of 1st Kings.
4. Verse 1: 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."
  - a) To understand this verse, we should back up a little and explain the history of Northern Israel, which was a separate kingdom from Southern Israel at this point in history. It has now been 56 years since Israel split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom has had a succession of bad kings. Many of these kings have killed the previous king ruling before them as well as the king's family in order to be the next king. Others won it by rebellion. None of them were loyal to God. The current bad king of the moment is named Ahab.
    - i) He married a non-Jewish woman named Jezebel who's mentioned a few times in the New Testament on the topic of idolatry. That is because this couple not only turned from God, but also required the Israelites living in this Northern Kingdom also worship this false deity.
    - ii) Let me also discuss the false god of the moment. The short version is that this god was called Baal. (It's actually more complicated than that, but "Baal" will work as an abbreviation.) This made up deity was said to control the weather. Living in a dry climate like Israel, rain was important for survival. When these Israelites did pray to Baal, they were praying for good weather as well as prosperity. To show their loyalty to Baal, animals were sacrificed and sometimes children. Worship of Baal was the reason the original inhabitants of Israel were destroyed by God due to their child sacrifices.
    - iii) I state all of that background as it helps us to understand Verse 1. Out of nowhere, we get introduced to Elijah. Somehow and somehow, he tells the king that there will be no rain for the next few years except when he says so. Given the fact that this king worships Baal for getting the rain needed for the land of Israel, this was a bold prediction made by Elijah.
  - b) Stop and consider what we don't know here:
    - i) How did God give this message to Elijah? We don't know.
    - ii) How did Elijah get close enough to the king to give him the message? Don't know.
    - iii) How did Elijah make it not rain nor even allow morning fog to appear for over a three-year period? Don't know. He just knew he had the power to control the weather by this prayer and he prayed accordingly.

- c) Now stop and consider what is happening by this prayer: Innocent people and animals will not have any water in a relatively short time. You want a reason why we should not mess with God? Here is a good one right here. Does this mean God has control over the weather? Of course. If that is true, why does he allow floods, tornadoes and other things that cause disasters in certain locations? The short answer is this world is cursed by sin. Having a world that is cursed affects this planet in a negative way. God calls us to trust in Him through the tough times. If this lifetime is all that there is, the world is a very unfair place to live. If we live forever, that is the only fair way I know of allowing such disasters.
    - i) Coming back to these Israelites, remember that the whole nation had turned from God to worship Baal. For Elijah to say "no rain except at my command" is in effect a slap in the face at Baal. It is Elijah saying in effect, "You can pray all you want to Baal for the next three years or so, I (God) am in charge and no one else!"
    - ii) The reason God brought Elijah on the scene here is in effect a countermove to the fact that His people had turned from Him to worship this false deity Baal. With bad weather coming for over the next three years, it will remind all the Israelites whom should they really turn to, to provide for them.
    - iii) So does this mean we should pray for good weather or rain? In effect we pray for God to bless our lives, and that requires certain types of weather at certain times of the year. When we are obedient to what He desires of us, which is simply to be a good witness for Him, He does bless the land we live in with our weather.
      - a) So why do we suffer through bad storms, dry weather and the like, if there are many people here loyal to God? Again, we are back to the issue of our dependence upon God for our lives. It's almost as if we need to suffer by some sort of bad weather in order to get our collective focus back on God and say, "Are you going to help us or not?" I believe that is when God is thinking "Glad to hear from you all. It's been a while. I see the weather's gotten your attention, so trust in Me and I'll guide you through the storms of life you face for My glory."
  - d) With all that said, believe it or not, I need to come back to Verse 1. It says that Elijah was from Tishbe in Gilead. This location is part of modern Jordan today. Don't get me wrong I do believe Elijah was Jewish. When the twelve tribes of Israel first settled in that land, two and one tribes lived east of the Jordan River. That included "Gilead". OK, and why is that important? It shows that God can raise up a prophet from anywhere and not just say, Jerusalem. It also shows this man did not have to sneak into the Northern Kingdom as he was already a citizen there. That could explain how Elijah was allowed to get so close to the king as the guards probably thought he was going to worship Baal with the king.
  - e) Before I finish Verse 1, let me also tell you what Elijah means: My God is Jehovah. This means that Elijah was named after the true God in a time period where idolatry was not only permitted, but required by the local Israelites.
5. Verse 2: Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: <sup>3</sup> "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>4</sup> You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there."
- a) Remember that in Verse 1 Elijah told the king, "no rain will come until I say so". We don't know how Elijah made that prayer or how God told him to give that specific line. We just know that the text says he did it this way, and of course, it is now time for Elijah to run for his life as this was an insult to the king and his belief.
    - i) Let's put it this way: Even if the king thought this man is a nut and I should ignore what he says, after say a year of no rain at all I guarantee that the king would want to find Elijah and see if he could bring an end to that lack of rain. Think about how much Ahab, the king prayed to Baal during this time frame for rain but to no avail. I'm guessing that Ahab was haunted by this prediction.

- ii) By the way, there will be another confrontation of Elijah and Ahab after the three-plus year period is completed, but that is coming up in the next chapter.
  - iii) Speaking of the time frame, Elijah only says a few years in Verse 1. Later in this chapter, we will learn it was over three years. In the New Testament, Jesus says in the Gospel that the time frame was three and one half years. (See Luke 4:25). Also in James' epistle, that same three and one half year time frame is given. How did they know the exact time period? It is just a simple proof that Jesus is God and He knows all things and He revealed that information to James. (See James 5:17.)
  - b) Meanwhile, I believe we did finally make it to Verse 2. The point here is that God told Elijah it is time to go run for your life. Since Elijah is from the region east of the Jordan River, somehow God made it obvious to him to go hide there. Specifically, God told him to go to a place called the Kerith Ravine. Think of that as a canyon with a brook or small river running through it. There, God said He would provide for Elijah.
6. Verse 5: So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. <sup>6</sup> The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.
- a) The short version here is Elijah did what he was told to do. He went to this specific place to hide from the king. There ravens brought his food and meat twice a day and Elijah was able to drink water from this brook before it dried up from a lack of rain.
  - b) At this point, let me talk about why God picked this method to provide for Elijah.
    - i) To explain, it is best to discuss the alternatives that God did not do. If God made it rain "manna" from the sky like in the book of Exodus, people would gather there to get the manna and someone would spot Elijah and maybe turn him in.
      - a) If animals brought Elijah food, others could track the animals and that would lead others to Elijah.
      - b) However, no one tracks bird movements, so that method is safe. If one is familiar with "clean and unclean" animals as explained in Leviticus 11:15, then one might know that ravens are considered an unclean bird as they eat dead carcasses. My point is Israelites would normally not track the movements of birds, especially one's that are considered unclean.
  - c) Now think about this from Elijah's perspective. "Hey God, you want me to eat food that has been dropped from the mouths of birds, unclean birds at that? Why won't the ravens eat the food themselves since they gathered it?" The answer is God can control all things, even the activities of birds for His glory. If God wanted a group of birds to specifically drop food every day at a certain location, He can make it possible.
    - i) So can I pray for birds to provide food for me daily? I suspect God's answer will be, "I gave you a brain. Now go use it to earn food!" Of course the exception is for those who can't, but you get my point. However, this text does show us that God can and does provide for us in ways we don't expect.
    - ii) Coming back to Elijah, if ravens are unclean birds, why would God use them to feed Elijah? The answer comes back to my lesson title: How God prepared Elijah for his role in the ministry and how that affects what God has called us to do as Christians. What all of that means is God is not through with Elijah and God is trying to build up Elijah's trust in Him by putting Him through this unusual way of survival to get Elijah to trust God more.
    - iii) Think of it this way: If God told us to go hide in some remote location and he will provide for us food in some miraculous way, it would take a lot of trust to do that. I've found that those God has raised up for great purposes usually have to start at the bottom to learn to trust Him with their lives. Let's face it, hiding in a canyon and trusting in unclean birds every day to drop food on you is about as low as one can get and one depends upon God daily for survival in that situation.

- d) Deviating a little, I suspect that John the Baptist spent time in his youth studying Elijah. After all, God told John's parents that he would be a messenger pointing the way to the Messiah when he came. John's parents were Levites (priests). I can just see John's parents telling John stories when he was a boy about Elijah and how God used him. I wonder if that is what inspired John to go live in the wilderness, which he did as he baptized people to prepare them for their encounter with Jesus. (References Luke 1:5, 3:2-4, et.al.)
  - e) Meanwhile back to Elijah himself. Not only did he have to depend upon bread and meat from ravens daily, but he had to go draw water from a local brook. My point is that Elijah may have been a wanted man in Israel, but he still had to go out in public to draw water from this brook in order to survive. I sort of picture Elijah living in a cave. He thought oh look, the morning meat and bread just fell on my doorstep! It's time to go back inside my cave for breakfast. It's one thing to trust in God's miracles to fall on our doorsteps. It is another to have to go out in public to say, gather water to trust in Him for his survival.
    - i) My point is making a difference for God does not mean to lie in bed all day and wait for God to miraculously provide for us. Again, God gave us a brain and He expects us to use it. Elijah had to leave the comfort of home to go give the message to the king in the first place. Elijah had to trust God for protection when the king would want to kill him for that message. Elijah had to trust God even more to go back out in public every day to gather water for his own survival. My point is that just as Elijah had to move to be used by God, so we have to move to be used by Him for our own lives.
  - f) Meanwhile, it's time for God to change the plan as this scene was getting old.
7. Verse 7: Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>9</sup> "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."
- a) If Elijah prayed for no rain in that area, sooner or later the brook that provided water for Elijah would dry up. Now after an unspecified time frame, it did. Therefore, it is time for God to change the plans. Sometimes we wonder in our own work for God, is it time for us to change our plans? Personally, I find God makes it obvious when it is time to move on and now is one of those times.
  - b) Anyway, now that Elijah is staring at a dry brook and wondering what to do today, God gives him a message to go to a place north of Israel called "Sidon". From where he was, it was not a long journey as there was no water left in Israel. I'm betting as he was traveling there he was wondering how do I find this widow? How do I even know who is the right person? Will anyone turn me into the king's guards if I ask around to find this person? This is another example of learning to trust God with one's life.
  - c) When it comes to trusting God, all I can do is give you personal examples: I don't hear the voice of God telling me daily to write. I just write because I can't stand not doing it. I read my bible daily because I can't stand not doing it. I am obedient to what the bible tells me to do because I believe Jesus is God and I believe He is Lord over my life. Of course I am saved by grace alone, but out of gratitude for that grace, I want to be pleasing to God so therefore, I do what I am good at in order to make a difference for Him. I don't know if that helps you to understand how to live the Christian life, but that's the best I can explain it using my own life as an example. Am I perfect? Far from it. However, I trust that God is guiding me if I let Him and I know it is true based on years of experience.
8. Verse 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?" <sup>11</sup> As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."
- a) OK, it is time to get back to Elijah. He is traveling to this town and the first person he sees at the town gate, is a woman gathering sticks. Since Elijah is on the lookout for a desolate widow, such a woman would be a good candidate.

- b) Let me explain why God picked Zarepath as the place where Elijah is to go to.
    - i) First of all, this is not in Israel. It is part of modern Lebanon. Verse 9 refers to that place as "Zarephath of Sidon". You may recall Jesus' words when he was putting down the Israelites that rejected him by saying, "If Tyre and Sidon had seen the miracles you had seen, they would have repented a long time ago". (A paraphrase of Matthew 11:21). My point is just to say Zarapath is not part of Israel. It appears to be part of an area controlled by the nearby city of Sidon.
    - ii) Back in Chapter 16 Verse 31, it stated that the current king of Israel named Ahab married "Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians". Remember that the big issue of the moment as far as God is concerned is the fact that the Israelites are worshipping a false god named Baal. Jezebel led the Israelites in that worship as we will read in the next lesson. My point here is her father is the king of Sidon and therefore he ruled over Zarepath, where God told Elijah to go to. My point of all of this is simply that Elijah was sent to a place to live outside of Israel where Baal worship was common.
    - iii) With Elijah here, he could show others how God is superior to Baal and the fact that God is the God of "everywhere" and not just Israel. Elijah is also still in close enough proximity to Israel where God could lead him back to King Ahab once the drought was to be officially over. In the meantime, Elijah could hide out in a city where Baal worship is common, but still not easily be found by King Ahab.
    - iv) Here is how all of this affects you and me. If we want to be used greatly by God, we have to learn to be humbled by Him and often do things we don't want to do in the first place. Elijah had to go live among Baal worshippers during the water drought in Israel and depend upon a desolate widow for his survival. That is a good test of trusting God in the worse of situations.
    - v) With that said, I need to change topics to explain what Elijah does next:
  - c) Let me now explain the Jewish (Yiddish) word "Chutzpah" (pronounced "hootspa"). It's about having the guts to ask for something we shouldn't be allowed to ask. My favorite example of chutzpah is about a man who kills his parents and when he is on trial, he asks the court for mercy because he is now an orphan. (That's a famous joke, not a true story.)
    - i) The reason I want you to know about chutzpah is because Elijah has it. God told him that he was going to encounter a widow. Elijah never met this woman and she didn't know him from Adam. Besides there has been a drought going on for a good while now.
    - ii) Given the fact that Elijah has been traveling for a while probably without any food or water, he has the chutzpah to ask this stranger, can you get me a drink of water oh and while you're at it, I'm starving and I don't have birds any more to bring me food, so can give me a little something to eat? Yes I'm exaggerating, but I suspect that Elijah is so hungry and thirsty at this point and he assumes this is the widow that God called to see, he has the chutzpah to ask this stranger these questions.
  - d) With that said, we are ready for the woman's answer:
9. Verse 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."
- a) To paraphrase the widow, "Stranger, I get the idea that you are a beggar. However, what you don't know is you picked on the wrong person to beg. The only food I even own is a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. The point is you picked the wrong person to ask that question. Normally, I am generous to strangers, but I don't have anything that can help you at this time." Now let me go home with my son that we may eat a final meal together and then die. It's a wonderful mixture of "I'd love to help you, but I'm about to die myself so let me and my only child go die in peace".

- b) Remember back in Verse 7 that God told Elijah that a widow would provide him with food. Elijah was convinced she was the one because she was the first woman that Elijah saw in this town, and she admitted to Elijah she was a widow. Therefore, because he was trusting in God to provide for him through this woman, he trusted that God would use her to do some sort of miracle so that both he and her would have food. With that said, Elijah makes another bold statement in the next verse.
10. Verse 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. <sup>14</sup> 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.' "
- a) The short version here is that Elijah knew that God would provide for him through this woman, so he makes a prediction that this woman's food supply and oil supply would not run out until the rain starts up again. We don't know if God told him to make this specific prediction or it just came out as a prayer request.
- b) One has to understand the context. Not only was Elijah outside of Israel, but he's making this prediction in God's name. Remember that this is the "Land of Baal". It is God's way of saying, "I'm the God of the whole world, and not just Israel. I'm in control of all things including the weather and including supplying us with our daily needs." By showing this widow how God can provide for her in a bad drought, it shows us how God can provide for us when no other options seem possible. As I stated earlier, I am convinced that God loves to do His best work when we run out of all other options. It is His way of saying I and I alone get the glory for My work in people's lives.
- c) Meanwhile, we are back to Elijah's chutzpah here: Imagine asking someone who just told you that she is about to eat the only food she has left in the world to make some for you. That is chutzpah. The greater chutzpah is then to tell this woman that the God of Israel, the one you don't worship will provide food and oil for you for a long time if you can just make for me (Elijah) a little food.
- d) If I were this woman, my first thought would be, "OK, this is a nut job. I only have a little food left for my son and myself. Now this stranger wants me to give him some of it and he will somehow magically provide much more food for a long time". If I was her, I'd say get lost and go home with her son. Because she took Elijah up on that offer and she was willing to trust in the God of Israel (remember that they were not in Israel), God blessed her life in amazing ways and she is remembered throughout history.
- i) There's the lesson for you and me. The point is God is always looking for people who are willing to take a risk for them. God then blesses their lives far greater than they can imagine if they are willing to take that risk for Him. Does that mean if I'm about to die I should entertain the first stranger I meet who promises me the world? Probably not. However, I do find that if we are willing to trust in God, He will lead us down paths we never would imagine taking and lead us to a greater life than if we say no to Him with our lives.
- e) With all of that said, we now read of the choice that this non-Israelite woman made here:
11. Verse 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.
- a) The short version is she took the risk, and life happened exactly as Elijah predicted.
- b) Stop and consider how God provided for her and Elijah. If God had rained down food, or if birds brought them food daily the neighbors would see this occur. Remember that the area suffered from the drought too. The way it occurred probably made the neighbors think, "I haven't seen that woman or her son for awhile", but they don't go in her house to see how she is surviving as they are all busy trying to survive themselves. As to Elijah, he got his food and water and I assume some of that food provided for him as well.

- c) So if this was a drought and Elijah was a prophet why didn't he help everyone in that area if people were starving due to the drought? Believe it or not Jesus Himself answered that question: "There were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon." That's from Luke 4:25b-4:26.
    - i) Jesus point was that many suffered due to the drought at the time of Elijah, yet God only sent Elijah to the house of this woman who lived outside of Israel. The point is God cares for all people, but God chooses to help who God chooses to help and only those who are willing to call on Him. In fact, when Jesus made that point the people who heard it were so mad at Jesus for claiming that God can help non-Jews as a priority over Jews, they tried to kill him at that point.
    - ii) Also noticed that Jesus validated that story as historical truth by telling it here.
  - d) Meanwhile back to Elijah himself. What is implied but not stated is that Elijah went to go live with this woman. By the way, it was not like he was sleeping with her in her bed.
    - i) What was very common in that culture in that area was for people to build patios on their rooftop due to the heat. It was a cool place to rest on hot days and it was usually covered. The logical assumption was that this was where Elijah lived.
    - ii) While I'm explaining technicalities, let me talk about the food itself. To explain it simply, oil and flour is the basic ingredients of cakes. Not a 17 layer chocolate one, but a basic food substance that one can survive on. During this time of a drought God made possible for His witness to the world to survive and still be a witness for Him. That is a lesson for us. God never promises say, great financial blessings if we trust in Him, but He will see us through the best and worse of times His way if we are willing to trust Him to guide our lives.
  - e) Meanwhile back to the text. The main point is this woman did as Elijah asked her to do. She gave him some of her food and she was then blessed as her food and oil supply did not run out most likely until the drought was over. Meanwhile, God is not through in the lives of Elijah and this widow. It's time for the next step in this story:
12. Verse 17: Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.<sup>18</sup> 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?"
- a) The story here is the widow's son got sick and died. We don't know how old the boy was, but Verse 19 coming up says that Elijah carried him upstairs to where he lived, so he must have been light enough to carry. Remember that because this woman was a widow, she was probably depending upon that son to care for her in her old age. Now all of sudden effectively, the son dies.
  - b) What is interesting is Verse 18. By this point in the story, the widow knows that Elijah is a prophet of God. She's angry because her son died and she does what most people do and get angry at whoever is around them due to their anger. (By the way, I remember during my own times of dealing with death how easy it is to snap at those around me.) The point is she blamed Elijah for his death. She makes an interesting statement that her son died due to her sin. I don't know what it is she felt guilty about. It could be some past sin in her life or simply that she worshipped Baal and now due to Elijah being a witness to her, she now sees it as a sin. Don't know, that is speculation. Bottom line is she is angry as her only way she saw of surviving in her old age (dependence upon her son) was now gone.
  - c) Before we get to Elijah's response, notice that Elijah didn't say, "Hey it's not my fault. I'm just doing God's will. If it was God's will for your son to die, accept it. After all we are all living in this time of a severe drought and people are dying all around us. Now just trust in God and He will provide for you just as he does this food and oil. Stop looking at me (Elijah) to fix this is." Instead, Elijah works to trust in God to help this situation:



13. Verse 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. <sup>20</sup> 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?" <sup>21</sup> 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!"
- a) Remember how I said that Elijah was living in the room above her house? Well, Elijah was so grieved by her death that he carries the dead body of the boy up to her room and prays over the body that he may come back to life again.
  - b) Before I discuss the miracle itself, consider the topic of bringing the dead back to life:
    - i) This is the first time in the bible that a miracle is recorded of the dead coming back to life again. There are a few other examples in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. In fact, here it happens to a non-Jewish person. It is God's way of saying, "I'm the God of all people and I'm choosing to perform this miracle on a non-Jewish person to show that I'm the God of everyone."
    - ii) By the way, if my memory is correct, Baal worship included the belief that he was able to raise up dead people. With God rising up this boy from the dead, it shows that He is greater than Baal in that sense of power too.
    - iii) Doesn't the bible say that we are all appointed to die once and then the judgment? (That's from Hebrews 9:27). So why does this boy as well as a few others get the privilege of being raised from the dead? Consider the fact that those few who get that privilege still have to die again in a relatively short time span. It's not like God raised them from the dead and they are still alive today. The point based on the book of Hebrews is that we all die and that's that. The few exceptions are there to show God's power for those who don't believe that He has the power over life and death and this is one of those cases.
  - c) Coming back to Elijah, if this miracle has never happened in the Old Testament to date, why did Elijah pray this way? After all, isn't it against the Jewish law to even touch a dead body? (See Numbers 9:6 as an example). Think about how many times in history when God has taken away someone's life and everyone around them wishes for a miracle that this person can live longer. I always think of young children who die of cancer. Why is it Elijah could do this miracle and yet people tragically die in horrible ways?
    - i) Let's start with "everyone else". The short version is our world is cursed by sin. It causes all of us to die at some point. The tragedy of death is all around us. That is why I take comfort in the fact that heaven is a far greater place to live than living in this world that is cursed by sin.
    - ii) As to Elijah, it is not a death sentence to touch a dead body. Those verses that say it is against the law say that one is unclean until the next day when they do that. Here Elijah is willing to take that risk in order to attempt to do a miracle. I guess that Elijah realizes that he and "God's reputation" are on the line here. The woman thinks the boy died due to some sin she committed. Here is an opportunity in the land of Baal worship that God is greater than any other deity.
    - iii) If you have ever listened to the testimonies of missionaries who work in locations that are not God dominated, they usually tell of far greater miracles than the one's you and I may see in our lifetimes. If any of you are familiar with the late Walter Martin, he is most famous for writing a popular book owned by pastors on dealing with cults. He also hosted a bible call in radio show for many years. My point is he said that when he was a missionary many years earlier, he once did raise some person from the dead. My point is such a miracle is not beyond the reach of some Christians if that is God's will for that moment in time.
    - iv) In summary here, when God chooses to, He can make an exception to the "die once" rule, but it is usually done as a witness to nonbelievers in His existence.

- d) Meanwhile, back to Elijah: He was so torn by this boy's death he took the boy upstairs to his patio room and prayed over him three times. Why three? Did God not hear Elijah the first time? Of course not. Praying over an issue more than once is about showing God our commitment to Him. Remember that the purpose of this lesson is to show us how God is building up Elijah's faith and how that is a model for us to build up our own faith in Him. By having Elijah going through this multiple prayer ritual and have something done that has never been done before, it was building up Elijah's own faith in what God can do not only for Israelites but for anyone willing to trust in Him as God.
    - i) By the way, I don't believe it was Elijah's method that saved the boy. It was only about Elijah's commitment to trust in God that this miracle occurred. I'm guessing that if Elijah prayed over the boy downstairs, the results would be the same.
  - e) Meanwhile, it is time for the happy ending of this chapter. (For those of you who have been reading all of my "Kings" studies so far, we are way overdue for a happy ending!)
14. Verse 22: The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. <sup>23</sup> 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!"
- a) There are some who like to argue that the boy didn't really die, he just fainted and then he revived on his own. Personally I disagree and so does the text if you study it carefully as taught in the original language. So if the child was well, why didn't he run downstairs to tell his mother all by himself? I suspect the child was left in a weak state so that Elijah is the one would get the credit by carrying the boy downstairs himself.
  - b) Consider this whole scene from the widow's perspective. She was dependant upon that boy to take care of her when she got older. She probably accepted the idea that her son was dead but still grieving over the loss. She agreed to let Elijah take the boy upstairs as if he could do something. The next thing she knows is Elijah is now carrying the same boy alive downstairs again. She doesn't know how or what Elijah did, but only that her son was now alive again. I'm guessing that Elijah was as shocked as the mom was that her son was alive. It's not like Elijah said, "Yes I do this every day. Is there anyone else I can bring back to life for you while I'm in the neighborhood?"
  - c) Remember that God is working on Elijah's faith to increase as well as the woman's. This is the man that Jesus talked to in the New Testament. We'll get to Elijah's own "death" in a few lessons. For the moment, let's enjoy the happiness and not demand more of him.
  - d) At the least, Elijah did convert this one woman and probably her son from worshipping in Baal to the God of the Israelites. How else Elijah is a witness for God and how else God is going to increase Elijah's faith is coming up in the next lesson. In the meantime I still have one more verse to cover.
15. Verse 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."
- a) Bottom line is she was converted. We don't know anything more about this woman and what happened to her after this story. Is she in heaven now? Most likely, but we'll have to find out ourselves one day. Did she lead others in her town away from worshipping Baal to now worship the God of the Israelites? We don't know. We just know that God did use this woman to help increase the faith of Elijah and God blessed her because she was willing to take a risk of giving some of her food to Elijah when she didn't have much to live on in a world that was dying around her.
  - b) Just so you know the story of Elijah continues for the next few chapters. God gives us a wonderful break from "these kings are bad and this one was good" to show us how we can grow in our trust in God and be used by Him to make a difference in this world.
    - i) What is to be learned from this lesson is not the details of the life of Elijah, but that we too can grow in our trust in God and be used in a mighty way if we are willing to trust in Him. I can't think of a better way to use the time God has given us.

- c) Remember that we live in a world cursed by sin and people are in effect dying around us due to their lack of trust in God. While we may not raise up people from the dead, we can share the good news of Jesus and how trusting in Him does lead to eternal life as He alone can pay the complete price for our sins.
    - i) Think of it this way: If we know we are good, say 60% of the time, how can we be sure 60% is good enough for God? Can't. But Jesus paying the complete price for our sins, means we don't have to worry about being good say 60% or 1% or 99% of the time. We are 100% forgiven, period. That is why I like to say there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. Being a Christian means that out of gratitude for what God has done for us, we use our time to make a difference for Him. That is why being a Christian costs us "nothing and everything" at the same time.
  - d) I want you to notice one more thing about Verse 24 before I wrap up this lesson. Notice the widow only said after Elijah performed this miracle on her son that she believed in the God of the Israelites. That implied the miracle of the daily flour and oil wasn't enough to convince her to change religions. However, death to life of her son did the trick. Why is that? I suspect part of it as that she believed that Baal could do miracles as well when it came to say producing food by a miracle. However, bringing one back from the dead was beyond the ability of Baal and it had to be God who could do such a thing. So do we have to raise the dead in order to lead others to Jesus? In effect that is what we do every time a person accepts Jesus into their lives, they are going from death to life. I have found that for most people it is not an instant conversion, but a series of steps. Therefore, helping to lead others closer to that step is what God calls us to by being a living witness for Him.
    - i) Notice that Elijah did not ask this woman to become a Jew. Elijah just did his best to be living witness for God and then let God do the rest. That is what He calls us to do as well, be a witness for Him and let people figure out the truth from there. Don't get me wrong, asking people to accept Jesus is a good thing. I'm just saying that what is just as important is being a good witness for Him.
16. Let me end this lesson by coming back to one of my opening questions: How did Elijah lead the Israelites closer to God? The answer is he hasn't yet. What we learn as Christian is that in order for God to use us in a great way, often He has to humble us to teach us to trust Him more. That is what we see in this chapter. Consider the three main things that happen in this chapter:
- a) The first is Elijah put a curse on the King of North Israel and the residents of that land. He prayed for no rain for over three years and that curse literally came true.
  - b) Next Elijah had to go hide in the middle of nowhere, trust in unclean birds to drop food for him every day and to get water from a nearby brook until that brook dried up.
  - c) Then God tells Elijah to go live outside of Israel in the home of Baal worship and trust in a pagan woman to provide for him. He performs two great miracles for her: A miraculous supply of food during a long drought and bringing her son back to life from the grave. In both cases he was showing those living in the land of Baal that God ruled over the world and that this widow can now be a living witness for God in a land ruled by idolatry.
  - d) In summary, the events of Elijah's life to date were used to increase his own faith in God as well as lead others closer to God. That in effect is what God calls us to do as believers in Him and followers of Jesus: Trust in Him and lead others closer to Him. With that said, I'll end the lesson here and pray that God use each of us to make a difference for Him in a lost and dying world.
17. Father, one of the hardest things in life to accept is about being "humbled" by you and being put in situations where we have to trust in You and You alone for our survival. Help us to learn that by trusting in You alone, we can use the most valuable gift you give us, our time in order to make a difference for in this world. Help us to see others rise from the dead as we lead others closer to eternal life by having them and us trust in You for our eternal life. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.