

Week 2: Elijah Prophesies a Drought: 1 Kings 17:1–16

Hook



Main Point: God provides for His people and cares for the vulnerable.

Q: If you were given a meal budget of \$10 for the day and could eat only what you purchased that day, how would you spend your money?

Q: If you were given a meal budget of \$1,000 for the day and could eat only what you purchased that day, how would you spend your money?

Q: How did you set your priorities for what you bought?

The average American spends about \$848 a month on food – \$519 on groceries and \$329 eating out.¹ Finding food is rarely a problem. There are more than 45,000 supermarkets across the United States, and each one carries, on average, nearly 32,000 items.² While food deserts are a real and sobering reality for some communities, most Americans live with remarkable access to food: about 60 percent live within a mile of a grocery store, and the median distance to the nearest food store is just nine-tenths of a mile.³

For many of us, abundance is normal. Shelves are stocked. Options are endless. If one store is out of something, another is just down the road.

Transition: Today's lesson introduces Elijah bursting onto the scene with a chilling announcement – a severe drought is coming. In a world where food and water will suddenly become scarce, God demonstrates that He alone is the true source of provision, sustaining His prophet and a vulnerable family in a way only He can.

RECAP: In the first lesson, we talked about the role of God's prophet in the Old Testament and how the prophets pointed ahead to Jesus. In the ancient world, kings often hired professional "prophets" to give them advice, men who said they heard from God (or the gods) but often just told them what they wanted to hear because they were

being paid. But God's true prophets spoke hard truths to people. God raised up prophets to preach to His people when they were rebelling against Him. These prophets told them how they were breaking God's covenant and what would happen if they did not repent. But their message wasn't about condemnation; it was about restoration. God's goal was for the people to repent and come back to Him.

The Old Testament prophets spoke God's messages both in word and deed. The prophets' words and miracles were both part of the message, telling His people about God's sovereignty, His provision, His care for the vulnerable, His salvation, and His love for the whole world. The Old Testament prophets pointed ahead to Jesus as the ultimate prophet who would not only speak God's Word, but *was* God's Word, embodied in flesh.

Elijah and Elisha came on the scene during the reign of Ahab, about 50 years after the nation split into the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) kingdoms. Ahab, who did more evil than all the kings before him, not only worshipped false images of God (the golden calves), he also worshipped the false Canaanite gods, Baal and Asherah. This is why God sent Elijah and Elisha.

Week 2: Elijah Prophecies a Drought: 1 Kings 17:1–16

Book

Main Point: God provides for His people and cares for the vulnerable.

Malachi 4:5–6 and Luke 1:13–17 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Elijah's goal was to turn the hearts of God's people back to Him.

Q: What does Malachi say Elijah would do? When would he come back?

Q: Do you see any similarities in the scripture references to the coming Messiah?

Q: How did John's ministry prepare the people for Jesus? For Judgment Day?

Elijah is the most influential prophet of the Old Testament besides Moses. Though Elijah never wrote a prophetic book, he did great miracles, challenged the 450 prophets of Baal, and never died but was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind by a chariot of fire. Elijah is still a significant figure in the Jewish faith today, representative of all the prophets, even though he never wrote a biblical book. Ever since Malachi was written (433–424 BC, about 400 years after Elijah actually lived), Jews have believed that Moses (representing the law) and Elijah (representing the prophets) will return before the Messiah and the end times (Deuteronomy 18:15–22; Malachi 4:5–6). Jews sing about the return of Elijah at the end of every Sabbath and pray for his return “speedily in our time.” At the end of the Passover Seder, they pour a glass of wine for Elijah and open the door to invite him in, reflecting their hope in the coming of the Messiah one day.⁴ When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, it was Moses and Elijah who appeared and talked with Him, which Christians consider proof that Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 17).

Elijah and Elisha are central characters in the books of Kings. Elijah is only briefly mentioned in Chronicles because, although it covers the same period of history, the theological purpose of Chronicles is different. Kings was written *during* the Exile, reflecting on why God sent His people into exile. The prophets were integral to this story because their purpose was to tell the people how they were breaking God's covenant and what would happen if they didn't repent, including exile. Chronicles was written *after* the Exile; it emphasized temple worship, the Davidic line, and Judah's spiritual life (Elijah and Elisha preached to Israel, not Judah). Kings emphasized the sin and idolatry of Israel and Judah, but Chronicles is a positive retelling of the history, focusing on the themes of hope and restoration.

Elijah's name means “Yahweh is my God,” while Elisha means “Yahweh is salvation.” In the New Testament, John the Baptist came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17) and was also like Elijah in his physical appearance and lifestyle, living an austere life in the wilderness. Both wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt, rugged and

coarse in deliberate contrast to the soft luxury fabrics of the king and his well-paid prophets. Like Israel in the wilderness, they both lived off food provided supernaturally by God, emphasizing dependence on Him.

Elijah preached repentance to God's people during a time of widespread idolatry under Ahab and Jezebel. John the Baptist preached during a time of spiritual corruption under Herod and Herodias. Both confronted corrupt rulers boldly and publicly, facing persecution and death, though Elijah was taken up to heaven, while John the Baptist was beheaded.

Both served as prophetic forerunners, but Elijah's ministry wasn't technically "successful" because the people didn't really repent. On Mount Carmel, they did confess that Yahweh was the true God, but their repentance was brief and shallow. God revealed to Elijah that there was a remnant of 7,000 Israelites who had not bowed to Baal, but the nation as a whole did not repent. They returned again and again to idolatry until Israel was overthrown by Assyria in 722 BC, about 125 years later.

But that doesn't mean Elijah's ministry was futile. Elijah's story shows us the negative result of not repenting. The Northern Kingdom continued in idolatry, Israel was taken into exile, and the Ten Tribes of Israel were "lost"; they assimilated and intermarried into other people groups. By the time of Jesus, the people there were "Samaritans," a mix of people groups and religions with a few remnants of Yahweh worship mixed with pagan religions.

Jesus described John the Baptist as "the Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:14). Their message was the same, but John was successful, not because John was any better than Elijah but because of Jesus. The "failure" of Elijah's ministry shows us that the law cannot save. The prophets pointed to the need for a changed heart that only Jesus could bring (Ezekiel 36). John's message was different because he wasn't pointing ahead to the Messiah; Messiah was actually here (Matthew 3:2; Luke 16:16).

What's more, the ministry of Jesus shows us that God didn't give up on the Ten Tribes that were lost. Over and over, Jesus went to the Samaritans, the descendants of the remnant of those tribes who intermarried with other nations for more than 700 years. The longest theological conversation Jesus had in the Gospels was with a Samaritan woman whose theology was a little bit of Israelite religion distorted and mixed with paganism. Jesus returned to the land where Elijah "failed" and redeemed his ministry. Elijah prophesied a drought; Jesus told the Samaritan woman He was the living water (John 4:10–14). Elijah called Israel to worship the true God on Mount Carmel; when the Samaritan woman asked which mountain to worship on, Jesus called her to worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Where Elijah saw stubborn hearts, Jesus saw the fields ripe for harvest (John 4:35). Elijah confronted the nation and only a remnant believed, but Jesus talked to one woman and many believed (John 4:39). Elijah's ministry wasn't a failure; it just wasn't finished. Jesus fulfilled what Elijah had preached almost a thousand years before.

Q: How have you seen Jesus change people's hearts, turning them back to God?

Q: In what ways do people still need to repent and hearts need to be changed?

Q: What does a changed heart look like?

1 Kings 17:1–6 [Read]

Talking Point 2: God is our provider and our hiding place in times of trouble.

Q: Why did Elijah prophesy drought in the land?

Q: How did God provide for Elijah during the drought?

Q: What was significant about Elijah going to the river during a drought?

Just after Kings tells us that Ahab did more evil than any ruler before him by his worship of Baal and Asherah, God's prophet Elijah came, prophesying drought. This is the first time Elijah appears in Scripture; he essentially just pops up out of nowhere. Elijah was from Tishbe in Gilead, in the Transjordan, east of the Jordan River. This was technically outside of the Promised Land. It was not part of the original allotment of the 12 tribes, but some of the tribes asked Moses to settle there, and he allowed it. This made Elijah somewhat of an "outsider," a prophetic voice from outside the established religious and political systems of Israel, called to challenge the corruption and bring the people back to the Lord.⁵

This was not a random prophecy; drought was one of the curses of breaking the covenant, as rain was a blessing for keeping it (Deuteronomy 28:24). The curses were not unfair; this was a normal part of ancient covenants. Every covenant had stipulations, with blessings for keeping them and curses for breaking them. Theologically, the drought/rain as a curse/blessing shows us that following God brings life and flourishing, while turning away from Him brings death and destruction. When God made the covenant with Israel at Sinai, they committed to these terms, including the curses if they disobeyed. Elijah was simply pronouncing a punishment to which they had already agreed.

The drought was also a direct challenge to Baal, whom the pagans believed controlled the rain. By withholding rain and having it come at only His prophet's word, God showed His supremacy over the false "gods" of the nations. Only Yahweh has the power to control the rain; these "gods" were no gods at all (Deuteronomy 32:17). This set the stage for Elijah's later confrontation of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

The Psalms and Jeremiah both use this same imagery to talk about faithfulness to the Lord versus unfaithfulness. Those who trust in the Lord are like trees planted by the river. They don't have to fear when drought comes because they're getting water from a constant source (Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17). Jesus took this imagery even further when He

told the Samaritan woman He was the living water, a source of life that will never run dry (John 4). God made this imagery come alive for Elijah when He told him to hide by the brook of Cherith so he could drink directly from it. Even when there was drought, Elijah would have water because he put his trust in God.

The ravens brought Elijah bread and meat in the morning and in the evening, echoing how God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness in that first generation after the Exodus. God gave them manna and quail from heaven, both to show them His provision and to teach them to trust in Him for their daily bread. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that we can trust God to do the same for us. We don't need to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear because as God provides for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, He provides for us. We don't need to worry about tomorrow because He provides each day what we need for that day (Matthew 6:31–33).

James used this story to reflect on the power of the prayers of “the righteous.” A Gospel definition of *righteous* isn't about our own righteous works but about our faith in the Righteous One (Romans 3:22). Elijah was a prophet, but he wasn't magic; he was “a man with a nature like ours.” Yet when he prayed for drought, it did not rain, and when he prayed for rain, the heavens opened. Elijah's effectiveness wasn't related to any superhuman power, but the fact that he prayed with intensity for what God told him to pray. There is an important theological distinction to be made here. This isn't saying that if you're righteous enough, God will give you whatever you ask for. Praying for drought wasn't Elijah's idea; he prophesied what God told him to prophesy. This wasn't about Elijah's controlling God with his prayers. It was about his praying in accordance with God's will.⁶

Elijah's prophesy was an act of courage, as it directly opposed the king. But after he proclaimed this publicly, God told Elijah to go into hiding where God would provide for him and protect him from Ahab and Jezebel, who would have been seeking to kill him because of his condemnation of their idolatry. This reminds us of the way the Psalms talk about God as our refuge or hiding place, especially when David wrote about hiding from Saul when Saul was trying to kill him. When the world is a dangerous place, we can find sanctuary in the Lord. Like the Israelites in Numbers, David in Samuel, and Jesus in the Gospels, Elijah spent this time in the wilderness, depending on God as his refuge and strength, which prepared him for a difficult ministry that would take great courage, deep dependence on God, and trust in His Word.

Q: In seasons of uncertainty or struggle, how has God provided for your needs?

Q: In what ways has God been a refuge for you and helped you grow during times of wilderness?

Q: What experiences have been most instrumental for learning to trust in God?

1 Kings 17:7–16 [Read]

Talking Point 3: God cares for the vulnerable and loves His enemies.

Q: Where did this widow live? Look back at 1 Kings 16:31. Why was this significant?

Q: How does this story show God’s concern for the vulnerable?

God supernaturally provided for Elijah in hiding by the brook of Cherith until the brook dried up. Then God told him to go to Zarephath in Sidon, where Jezebel was from, where her father was the king. Elijah went from hiding from Ahab and Jezebel right into enemy territory. Jezebel led God’s people in worshipping Baal and Asherah, yet the person God ordained for Elijah to meet there stands in contrast to Jezebel.

Jezebel was a wealthy, powerful queen; the widow of Zarephath was poor and powerless. Widows were typically poor when they didn’t have a grown son to care for them, but this widow and her son were on the brink of starvation. She only had a handful of flour and a tiny bit of oil to prepare their last “meal” before they died. Yet Elijah asked her to use it to make a tiny cake for him before she made something for herself and her son, saying that the Lord of Israel promised her oil and flour would not run out until the drought was over. This was a big ask of faith. She wasn’t from Israel; she may not have even known about Israel’s God. She could have easily thought he was crazy, yet she trusted and obeyed God’s prophet.

Jezebel had rejected the message of the prophet of the God of Israel even though she was the queen of Israel, but the poor widow embraced God’s message. Jezebel sought to kill the Lord’s prophets, but the widow gave Elijah the last little bit of food she had. Jezebel had every advantage – wealth, power and knowledge of Israel’s God, but she rejected Him. The widow had no wealth, no power, no knowledge of God, yet she believed. In the long run, Jezebel died in the street, but the widow received life and provision for her future when her son was raised. God’s Word divides the proud from the humble, and the humble receive life and blessing.

The story of this widow and her son is also a parallel to the story of Hagar and her son, Ishmael (Genesis 16). Both were on the brink of death, and both encountered God and received His provision. Both were considered “outsiders” to the covenant, but God saw them and cared for them. Hagar called Yahweh “the God who sees.” Both stories show us that God’s mercy and love are for the whole world, even His enemies (Matthew 5:43–48; John 3:16; Romans 5:10). Both stories show God’s special care for the vulnerable.

Q: How might God be calling you to trust Him when your resources feel dangerously low? What would making the cake for God first look like in your life?

Q: Are there any people in our world whom you see as outsiders? How might this story change your perspective?

Q: If God sees the vulnerable and provides for them, how should that change the way we treat the weak, the poor and the marginalized around us this week?

Week 2: *Elijah Prophesies a Drought: 1 Kings 17:1–16* **Took**

Main Point: God provides for His people and cares for the vulnerable.

As you conclude this lesson on God’s supernatural provision in 1 Kings 17, prayerfully preselect a trusted group member ahead of time to briefly share a testimony of how God has provided for him or her in a season of need, helping the group see that the God who sustained Elijah and the widow still provides today; after this person shares, invite everyone to bow their head and close their eyes; then gently say, “If anyone is currently in a place of drought – needing God’s provision financially, spiritually, emotionally or relationally – simply place a hand over your heart as a quiet sign of dependence. No one is looking around.” Then pray anonymously for those responding, asking God to be their Refuge, their Provider, and their Daily Bread, trusting that the Lord who sees and sustains will meet every need according to His faithfulness.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about the way God has provided for you. Reflect on times His care for you has seemed supernatural. How has He worked miracles in your life? How have you seen God provide for every need? How has He shown you that you can trust Him for your future? How has God been your refuge and your strength in times of trouble?

PRAY: Pray for those in our world who are poor, vulnerable, marginalized or in need of special care. Thank God for seeing their needs and providing for them. Pray that we can also see them and provide for their needs, that the Church can be the hands and feet of Jesus to care for them.

ACT: Provide for the poor. Choose one way this week you can reach out to the poor and vulnerable, whether through donating to a local or international ministry or doing something more hands-on to provide for someone in need in your community.

¹ <https://www.ramseysolutions.com/budgeting/american-average-monthly-expenses?srsId=AfmBOop8czd9Sp2XnRIKP76qGFPSEC23Y6jiANqFy00sBw4p8BuE6O7L#food>

² <https://www.fmi.org/our-research/food-industry-facts>

³ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/june/u-s-shoppers-access-to-multiple-food-stores-varies-by-region>

⁴ Naftali Silberberg, “Why is Elijah the Prophet Invited to the Seder?” Chabad - [Why Is Elijah the Prophet Invited to the Seder? - Chabad.org](#)

⁵ Orville Nave, *The Nave’s Topical Bible* (Zondervan, 1969).

⁶ Patrick J. Hartin, *James, First Peter, Jude, New Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006).