

Lesson 3 18 August 2013

Elijah Sustained by God

Lesson Scope: [1 Kings 17](#)

Lesson Focus

"But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up (1 Kings 21:25)." These words sum up the moral landscape upon which Elijah appeared when he approached Ahab in this lesson. Unannounced and unsolicited, Elijah's message to Ahab was short and to the point: There would be neither dew nor rain until further notice from him. Period. The meeting was over; Elijah disappeared.

Elijah left no writings, but his actions and words reveal a man of genuine courage, faith, and zeal. It was no small matter to pronounce judgment upon a despot like Ahab; it took courage. Behind that courage lay a deep faith in God, who would withhold the rain for the next three and one-half years. His zeal for God is expressed in these words spoken to the angel at the cave at Horeb: "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts."

Faith in the providence of God rests in the fact that God is sovereign over all creation and that He has a deep interest in its ongoing activity. While many people choose to rebel against Him or to ignore Him completely, this does not change the fact that He is there and is ruling over all things. Nothing is left to chance or fate.

God has a plan for this world and each individual in it, and that plan will be accomplished. It is the height of absurdity to scoff at His authority over us. We cannot sin against a sovereign God with impunity. On the other hand, for those who submit to His plan, He is ready and eager to bless, to protect, and to provide all things necessary for ultimate success.

"He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail" (1 Samuel 2:9).

"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8).

"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12).

The godly face many perplexing circumstances in this unfriendly world.

They have, however, a friend and provider in their infinite God.

Lesson Aim: To glimpse the providence of God in behalf of His servants.

Theme Verse: [James 1:17](#). Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Lesson Text:

"The Ravens Brought Him Bread"

[1 Kings 17:1-6](#) ¹ And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. ² And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, ³ Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan. ⁴ And it shall be *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. ⁵ So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan. ⁶ And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

"The Barrel of Meal Wasted Not"

[1 Kings 17:7-16](#) ⁷ And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. ⁸ And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, ⁹ Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. ¹¹ And as she was going to fetch *it*, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. ¹² And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I *am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. ¹³ And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring *it* unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. ¹⁴ For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail,

until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. ¹⁵ And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days. ¹⁶ And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

"The LORD Heard ... Elijah"

1 Kings 17:17-23 ¹⁷ And it came to pass after these things, *that* the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. ¹⁸ And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? ¹⁹ And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. ²⁰ And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? ²¹ And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. ²² And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. ²³ And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

Questions for Study

"The Ravens Brought Him Bread"

1. Why was a drought in the land of Israel of special significance at this time?
2. What lessons can we learn from God's using ravens to feed Elijah?
3. What may be some "brooks" and "ravens" that God uses to provide for us?

"The Barrel of Meal Wasted Not"

4. What was the key to this widow's receiving help to survive the famine?
5. Is it possible to dismiss our fears when the dangers are close and real? If so, how can this be done?

"The LORD Heard ... Elijah"

6. What may have been God's purpose in allowing the widow's son to die?
7. How can we have a relationship with God as intimate as Elijah's was?
8. How should God's providence to us affect others' lives?

Important Teachings

1. God gives His faithful servants a hiding place in a hostile world (17:2-3).
2. God sovereignly controls the universe (17:1, 4, 9).
3. God's Word directs His servants (17:2, 8, 14).
4. God provides His servants with the necessities of life (17:6).
5. God never forgets the faithful (17:7-9).
6. God's ways are "past finding out" (17:9-14).
7. God is able to provide plenty in the midst of want (17:15-16).
8. God's servants enjoy an intimate relationship with Him (17:20-21).
9. God hears the cry and answers the prayer of His servants according to His will (17:20-22).
10. God empowers His servants so that they can reach out to others (17:20-23).

Analyzing the Passage

In announcing this severe drought (2 Kings 17:1), Elijah was only reaffirming the warning God gave Israel when they entered Canaan five hundred years earlier. "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain" (Deuteronomy 11:16--17).

Elijah's hiding place was by the brook Cherith (2 Kings 17:3), which was likely a tributary of the Jordan River. It likely flowed through the thickest part of the jungle in the Jordan valley. Elijah's position at Cherith (meaning "separation"), from a purely natural viewpoint, was very secure; but it was also very isolated from the rest of humanity and must have been extremely lonely. Yet God was with him, and that made all the difference. Elijah's name means "my God is Jehovah." To have God is really to have everything (Psalm 23:1).

After Cherith dried up, Elijah was sustained at Zarephath of Zidon (2 Kings 17:9), the homeland of Ahab's wicked wife Jezebel. Surely Ahab would not have thought to look there for Elijah. "God moves in a mysterious way, / His wonders to perform."

Principles and Applications

"The Ravens Brought Him Bread"

1. God gives His faithful servants a hiding place in a hostile world (2 Kings 17:2-3). As Elijah was, we are aliens in a fallen world full of treachery and danger. But to have God's blessing and protection is to have all we

need. Faithfulness may mean suffering or even death. It did for many, including Jesus. But even death is not a calamity if we have God's presence. We are going to face death anyway if time continues. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1).

2. God sovereignly controls the universe (2 Kings 17:1, 4, 9). It was God who brought the drought to Israel. It was God who commanded the ravens to carry bread and meat to Elijah. And it was God who commanded the widow to sustain Elijah. It is comforting to know that the Sovereign of the universe is in control of all things and that He has His eye upon you and me. With this knowledge one can face many hardships while still retaining hope and confidence.

3. God's Word directs His servants (2 Kings 17:2, 8, 14). One of the marks of our Anabaptist forefathers was their emphasis on holding high all of God's Word. We may not pick and choose according to our likes and dislikes. Elijah may have had some initial qualms about eating food brought to him by scavengers, but it was God's way and therefore was the only right way. Many times, to take God's way, we too must die to our own whims. "God's way is best; if human wisdom / A fairer way may seem to show, / 'Tis only that our earth-dimmed vision / The truth can never clearly know."

4. God provides His servants with the necessities of life (2 Kings 17:6). God is well able to meet all our needs. He knows better than we do what is in our best interest. Our natural limitations and shortsighted vision make it difficult to see the end of most of our motions and intentions. Therefore we must always conclude our requests to God with "not my will, but thine, be done." "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

"The Barrel of Meal Wasted Not"

5. God never forgets the faithful (2 Kings 17:7-9). "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). "For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5). Worry does us no good at all. It only takes us in circles, with no end in sight. Faith, the upward look, lifts our spirits high above these "trembling elements" to God, who is deeply concerned about each of us. He promises never to forsake us. Why would we not take the way of faith?

6. God's ways are "past finding out" (2 Kings 17:9-14). Taking care of Elijah was not problematic to an omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent God. One writer explained his faith in such a God something like this: "Give me Genesis 1:1 and the rest of the Bible is no problem." With God, miracles pose no problem at all. We may not be able to explain them to the natural man's satisfaction, but faith accepts the unexplainable works of God.

7. God is able to provide plenty in the midst of want (2 Kings 17:15-16). Elijah's order must have been a test to this widow's faith, but she obeyed, and God blessed her for it. It appears that her supply of meal and oil remained the same for the duration of this time, no matter how much she took from it. Every day required renewed faith.

"The LORD Heard ... Elijah"

8. God's servants enjoy an intimate relationship with Him (17:20-21). When Elijah spoke with Ahab, he referred to God as "the LORD God of Israel." In private he prayed, "O LORD my God." He had a very personal relationship with God. The goal of the entire Bible is that we have such a relationship with God. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

9. God hears the cry and answers the prayer of His servants according to His will (2 Kings 17:20-22). In this case God answered Elijah's cry, as both the child's mother and Elijah desired. Many times God does the same for us, but not always. His ways are far above ours (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Paul desired to have his thorn in the flesh removed, but God saw best to let it remain. If everything turned out in our favor all the time, we would become insufferably self-centered and self-serving. The concept that to find oneself, one must lose himself is a truth that we all desperately need to grasp. We find the answers to all of life's difficulties at the foot of the cross.

10. God empowers His servants so that they can reach out to others (2 Kings 17:20-23). Elijah's faith affected those around him. The widow was blessed by Elijah's presence. Her son must have been inspired in later years as he heard this story about himself. Neighbors likely heard about the miracles performed on this widow's behalf. Countless Bible readers ever since have been inspired because of Elijah's faithfulness in service to God in his time. Today it is our turn to be such salt and light in our world. We cannot change the whole world, but we can be the means of changing one life at a time right where we are. God will help us to do this if we choose to be faithful to Him as Elijah was.

Answers to Questions

1. Why was a drought in the land of Israel of special significance at this time?

The people had become Baal worshipers through Ahab's influence. God had forewarned that He would send famine if His people rejected Him.

2. What lessons can we learn from God's using ravens to feed Elijah?

A. God cares for His people.

B. His people must humbly accept His method of care.

God will care for His own but not necessarily in the way that we may prefer. These birds were unclean scavengers (Leviticus 11:13-15), and it may have been a bit humiliating at first for Elijah to take food from them.

3. What may be some "brooks" and "ravens" that God uses to provide for us?

God's Word and His Spirit can bring us refreshment wherever we are. We gain inspiration from spiritual interchange with our brethren. For our spiritual survival, we may need to accept help from unlikely sources, such as a brother or sister much newer in the faith than we are or someone whom we think we can help better than they can help us.

Humbling experiences help us recognize our mortality—sickness, death, material loss, and the normal aging processes that limit us. God uses all these things to help us sense our need of Him and His care.

4. What was the key to this widow's receiving help to survive the famine?

She needed to submit to the conditions laid out by Elijah—make the cake for him and then make one for herself and her son. This was not an unreasonable request. He explained to her that the meal and the oil would not fail if she obeyed him. Obeying certainly required faith.

5. Is it possible to dismiss our fears when the dangers are close and real? If so, how can this be done?

Yes. We cannot do so ourselves, but with God all things are possible. We may feel overwhelmed at times; then we must cast all our care upon Him. We must have faith in God's ability to do for us what He sees best, and we must have an eternal vision so that we can express the kind of testimony the three Hebrews expressed to Nebuchadnezzar. The certainty that "whether we live ... or die, we are the Lord's" is the most certain antidote for fear.

6. What may have been God's purpose in allowing the widow's son to die?

God may have allowed this as a test of faith for either Elijah or the widow, or for both. He may have allowed it so that He could show His power,

thereby strengthening Elijah's faith for the tests that lay ahead.

7. How can we have a relationship with God as intimate as Elijah's was? Relationships are not developed overnight. It takes time, much time, together to build lasting ones. Deliberate effort on our part must go into taking the needed regular time in reading God's Word, in praying, and in making personal application to what we have read.

We cannot wait until a crisis and then think we can call upon God and automatically have a good relationship. Begin now. Be open to God's leading. Follow it without reservation. Then, when difficulties arise, you will have a foundation for right responses even if things seem difficult.

8. How should God's providence to us affect others' lives?

As we have our spiritual needs met, our faith and obedience to God in the face of opposition can and ought to inspire the same in others. Our faithful intercession for the lost, for our government, and for the needs around us does make a difference. God hears and answers prayer today just as He did in Elijah's time. We all can be a positive influence in our neighborhoods if we are radiating the love of God. A visit, a letter, a gift of a meal or a loaf of bread, a telephone call, something to let them know you care—these are all ways we can affect others for good.

Summarizing the Lesson

Were it not for the providence of God and His assurance that He will be with us throughout all of life, truly this world would be a dark and hopeless place. But this is not the way it is. God is faithful. He does provide, and He promises to be with us unto the end. Elijah shows us a useful life lived with hope, purpose, and meaning. He believed in and obeyed God with all his heart, even in the midst of a world that was dark and gloomy.

"And dearer than all things I know is childlike faith to me,
That makes the darkest way I go an open path to Thee."

—*E.L.H.*

Research Guide

1. Research the meaning of providence in a Bible dictionary.
2. Read about Baal in a Bible dictionary.
3. The New Testament speaks of Elijah more than of any other Old Testament prophet. Read New Testament references to him (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:3-12; James 5:17-18).