

Lesson Two: I Kings 17:1-7 - Elijah and the Drought

Objective of Lesson Two: We will study Elijah's trust and obedience to God as well as God's provision for Elijah, discussing how we can learn to trust and obey better in our own lives.

We will start to look at two unifying themes in I Kings 17:

1. Life is made possible by God alone.
2. The word of the Lord as spoken through the prophet is important, is reality. (Keck, et. al., 1999)

We will think about why God may have sent Elijah to be off on his own, hiding, being provided for by God. We will think through how this might apply to our own lives - are there times when we need to be sustained by God? Are there times we are sustained by God? What does God teach us during these times?

Read I Kings 17:1

Elijah bursts onto the scene. All we learn about him is that he is a Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead and that he serves God and has a word from God for the King.

Read Deuteronomy 18:14-22 to see what Moses says about prophets.

What is the job of a prophet?

How will the people know if a prophet is a true prophet?

How do we immediately know that Elijah is a prophet?

What remains to be seen is if what Elijah says is true - will there be a drought? Is Yahweh the one who has power over life rather than Baal?

As we studied last week, Baal was considered the god of life, the god of rain. According to Canaanite mythology, Baal died and was resurrected every year, corresponding to the annual death and resurrection of nature (winter and spring). When there was drought, the people presumed that death (deified in Canaanite mythology) was victorious and that Baal was dead. When there was rain, they assumed that Baal was alive, death defeated.

“Let the heavens rain oil

The wadis run with honey

Then I will know that Mightiest Baal lives,

The Prince, Lord of the earth is alive.” - Ugaritic Narrative Poetry

(Keck, et. al., 1999)

Elijah insists that it is Yahweh who lives and makes life possible. He challenges Baal’s power directly by saying that there will only be rain or dew at the word of the Lord since drought would be a sign of Baal’s death or powerlessness.

“Seven years Baal is absent,

Eight the Rider of Clouds:

No dew, no downpour,

No swirling of the deeps,

No welcome voice of Baal.” (Canaanite lore)

(Keck, et. al., 1999)

Ahab has built altars to Baal in Israel, giving the impression that he also believes in Baal, believes that Baal has the power to bring rain. It is likely that many of the Israelites believe this also, as we will see in future stories.

How do you think Ahab receives this message from God through Elijah? Does he immediately believe the message? Scoff at the message?

Read I Kings 17:2-6

The Lord instructs Elijah to flee to the Kerith Ravine, probably one of the main deep and wide ravines east of the Jordan. Elijah is called to leave the promised land and go east of the Jordan, where Israel came from.

Here, we see that God’s will is revealed to Elijah one step at a time. “Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah...” shows us that Elijah did not know the next word from the Lord until after he gave his prophesy to the king. He obeyed God when God told him

what to say to Ahab, but he didn't know what God's plans were after that. We know what lies ahead for him, but he does not. He simply has to trust God.

What does God's instruction to Elijah and Elijah's willing obedience teach us about how to trust God, how to obey God?

For thought on this question: Proverbs 16:3 says "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." Elijah was committed to following God, to obeying God. He trusted God to establish the plans. It is often the nature of people to want to know what steps come next, not to move forward without a plan. Proverbs 16:9 says "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." We are asked to follow God without knowing exactly how everything will work out.

It takes time for a drought to show its effects. Elijah is sent to a brook that is a "wadi," a dry creek bed that flows only in the wet season. When God sends Elijah to the Kerith Ravine, there is still water in the wadi. The fields are still green, the cisterns are still full, the storage houses are still full of grain. It will take time before God's power becomes apparent.

Why do you think God sends Elijah into "hiding"?

Some ideas:

1. Once the drought takes effect, Elijah will be at the top of Ahab's Most Wanted List. Even if he did not believe him at first, he will be angry at Elijah for the drought. God is protecting him by hiding him.
2. Elijah has done a big thing, going to the king, speaking boldly! It would be easy for him to believe in himself, in his own power. Or, it would be easy for him to feel responsible for taking care of all the Israelites. Now, he is told to go somewhere, where he can do nothing - not even provide food for himself. His ability to rely on himself is taken away, and he sees the true source of provision, God.
3. This is a time of God deepening Elijah's faith and reliance on him. There are two extraordinary periods in the OT that are marked by multiple miracles - the time of Moses and the exodus and the time of Elijah and Elisha. Moses spent 40 years tending sheep in the wilderness before God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Elijah spent this time with God as he was being prepared for his public ministry. Even Jesus, the son of God, spent time with God in the desert as he started his public ministry.

How does God provide for Elijah's physical needs?

Does this story remind you of any other Old Testament stories of God miraculously feeding his people?

Exodus 16:11-13 (God provides quail and manna for people to eat)

What do you know about ravens?

- 24 to 26 inch wingspan (but can be more!)
- Omnivores
- Birds of prey: teams of birds are known to hunt down game too large for a single bird; prey on eggs and nestlings of other birds and rodents, grains, worms and insects
- Scavengers: sometimes dine on human garbage or on carrion, the decaying flesh of dead animals

How do the Israelites view the ravens?

Leviticus 11:13-15, “These are the birds you are to regard as unclean and not eat because they are unclean: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture....any kind of raven....”

(Also Deuteronomy 14:12-14)

These unclean birds of prey miraculously feed Elijah. He is well fed with bread and meat twice a day, clearly from the command of the Lord. The Lord provides miraculously and in ways that people would never expect. God uses even creatures that are unclean to fulfill his purposes!

Elijah is being prepared for God’s work by relying completely on God, learning to trust God even for the food he eats.

Do you have an example of the Lord providing for you in an unexpected way?

Read I Kings 17:7

What has happened while Elijah has been in hiding?

- effects of the drought are taking place

How do you feel about delays? How easy is it to feel like you are “doing nothing”?

Imagine what it felt like to be Elijah during this time. Did he wish he was still prophesying? Did he wish he was taking care of his own land? God hides him and continues to work even though it might seem to Elijah, who is in the wilderness with the ravens, that nothing is happening. God chooses Elijah to help him as he accomplishes his will but it is God doing the work.

We live during a time when there is a lot of emphasis on doing. Are there benefits today to having times of preparation? Do you believe there are times today when we need to spend time alone with God, preparing for the next step? Do you have an example from your own life that you can share?

Is time spent alone with God an example of “doing nothing”?

Thomas Kempis writes in The Imitation of Christ, "The person who wants to arrive at inferiority and spirituality has to leave the crowd behind and spend some time with

Jesus. Nobody's comfortable in public unless he's spent a good deal of time in the quiet of his home.” (Foster, et. al., 2005)

In a metaphorical sense, have there been times when you have felt like you were miraculously sustained in the desert? (times of grief, times of extreme need)

Robert Mulholland writes in his book Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation,

“What we don’t realize is that often a period of apparent spiritual stagnation, a time in which we don’t feel as if we are going anywhere, a phase of life in which our relationship with God seems weak or nonexistent, the time of dryness, of darkness - what the mothers and fathers of the church speak of as the desert experience - is filled with nurturing down below the surface that we never see.”

Read Psalm 46

Focus on vs. 10 “Be still and know that I am God”

How can we do a better job of being still and knowing that God is God?

Conclusion:

We often miss much of the significance of this story, possibly reading it and envisioning it kind of like Disney’s Cinderella, with the little birds providing for Elijah. The Israelites

would have heard this story so much differently! Those who had gone into captivity, would have been reminded that God takes care of his people. They would have remembered the story of the manna and the quail in the desert. They would have immediately recognized that God was providing for Elijah with unclean birds and in a place away from all of God's other people. Now, the people of God are living in a place where they do not want to be, outside of the promised land, needing to trust God again for his provision during a time of deep need. They had been carried away to another land by "unclean" people. They needed to be reminded that they could still rely on God, He would continue to provide for them in unexpected ways.

We also need to remember that God will provide for us, take care of us. We want to "work for God" which honors God! But, our work for God should flow out of relationship with Him and not out of our own need to be busy or our desire to control the world around us through our good deeds. God is able to accomplish His purposes - let us be still long enough to hear His voice as Elijah did and learn to trust in Him.