

OpenTheo

1 Kings 17 - 18



1 Kings - Steve Gregg

In this teaching, Steve Gregg explores the stories of Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17-18. Through these narratives, we see how God provided for his people during times of famine through unexpected means, such as ravens and a widow. Gregg emphasizes the importance of faith, even in difficult circumstances, and how God can use ordinary individuals to accomplish his purposes. He also highlights the power of prayer and God's ability to reveal himself to those who seek him.

Transcript

Let's look at 1 Kings chapter 17. And from this point on to the end of 1 Kings, we're going to be looking at the life of Elijah, the prophet. And God sent a number of prophets.

We've already read about several of them. There's Jehu, there's Hanani, and others that have rebuked the kings of the Northern Empire. And there's prophets in the South as well.

Elijah and his successor, Elisha, apparently are regarded to be the most important ones because the author spent a huge amount of time focusing on their ministries. The other prophets that we've read about have mostly been only really viewed in their confrontations with the kings. Although there was that chapter 13 incident where the unnamed prophet from Judah confronted Jeroboam and then later had his dinner with the older prophet and that little episode was given.

But we have never, up to this point, had a real focus on any of the prophets' private lives or an extended description of their activities. Elijah comes first and he is considered by Jews to be the chief of the prophets. Although he is not one of the writing prophets.

You know, the writing prophets are the ones who have left books for us, like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the minor prophets. But there were very significant non-writing prophets. And Elijah was perhaps the most significant of them, although Elisha also would be a contender for that role.

Elijah just shows up. We don't know anything about his background. We know he's from

Gilead on the east side of Jordan.

But we don't know much else. He's a Tishbite. It's not even known for sure if that's a reference to his family or his geography.

But it says, And Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word. Now, we don't know if he made an appointment to see Ahab about this or just caught him somewhere in public. But Elijah was a totally unknown person.

And so the claim he made must have seemed very outlandish that there would be no rain or dew until he said so. He's almost claiming to have the prerogatives of God himself. And in a sense he did because he was God's spokesman.

God had sent him with this message. And it would not be only God's word, but Elijah's word also. That would have to bring rain or dew.

And, you know, therefore, if Elijah was killed during the drought, there'd never be rain again. Because there'd be no more rain or drought until he said so. So you'd think he'd be invulnerable.

Nonetheless, he had to escape for his life. So as the word of the Lord came to him saying, Get away from here and turn eastward and hide by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.

So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed at the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. And he drank from the brook.

And it happened after a while that the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Elijah announced there was going to be a famine and no rain. There'd be a drought.

And so he was able to stay by this brook until the drought was so severe that the brook dried up. It was just one of the little rivulets that went into the Jordan. The Jordan, of course, would not dry up.

It was too significant a river. Its level would probably go significantly down, but some of these brooks that just ran into it were probably rain runoff for the most part. When the rain didn't happen for a long time, the brook disappeared.

Now that the ravens brought him food, is an interesting thing, partly because ravens were unclean animals. There were clean and unclean birds just as there were clean and unclean animals. And ravens were among those that were unclean.

If pigeons or doves had brought him food, that'd be less surprising, although fairly surprising. But a dove, for example, had brought back an olive twig to the ark. And so we know that doves can deliver, we know pigeons can deliver things.

Pigeons have been used to deliver messages for a long time. God could have had pigeons bring him food, and that would have been a clean animal. But instead, it was the wild, unclean ravens that brought him food, and he ate it.

Jews who are very strict about their Jewish kosher diet would not want to eat something that a raven had brought because of its contact with an unclean animal. But Elijah, though he was a spiritual man, apparently was not highly religious about those things. And so God used ravens to bring him food.

Now, where did the ravens get the food? It's not like having a falcon that can go out and catch you a rabbit or catch you a squirrel that you can eat. Ravens don't hunt like that, but they may steal. Ravens do steal things.

And we have to, I guess, assume that the ravens may well have gone and taken bread and other human consumables from homes and flown in the windows and gotten the food or whatever and brought them to Elijah. In any case, we can see that even though it was a famine, and Elijah was out of circulation because he was hiding probably in the bushes by the creek so that the king could not catch him. He couldn't go out and work and scavenge food.

But God provided for him through the wild animals delivering food to him. And so we're going to see that God's going to provide for him miraculously another way, too. Now that the creek has dried up, he's got to find another place to stay.

Then the word of the Lord came to him saying, Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Now, Sidon is where Jezebel was from. She was the princess of Sidon.

Her father was the king. And here God is telling Elijah, who's fleeing really from Ahab and Jezebel, to flee to the territory where Jezebel is from, where her father was the king. It's like going into dangerous territory, one would think.

However, God was going to supply for him supernaturally and hide him there. He says, See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you. Now, whether God had already spoken to this widow or he simply means I have a widow in mind that I've assigned to this task, she doesn't know it yet, is not clear.

So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, Please bring me a little water and a cup that I may drink.

And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand. Then she said, As Yahweh your God lives, see, she was a pagan, but she knew he was a Jew. As Yahweh your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin and a little oil in a jar.

And see, I'm gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son that we may eat it and die. It was a famine and she was a widow. Widows have it hard even at the best of times and during famine even more so.

A widow can beg, but in times of famine, there's not a lot of donors. And so she had come down to the end of her supplies and had only enough for one more bit of bread. And this she intended to give to her son and herself, and then they've just figured after that, they'll just waste away because there was nothing more to eat.

Elijah said to her, Do not fear. Go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first and bring it to me, and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says Yahweh, God of Israel, The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.

So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah, and he and her household ate for many days. So he apparently stayed at her house as well. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Elijah.

Now, God can provide for his people in miraculous ways. He can have wild animals, bring them food, or a Gentile who doesn't have anything. A woman who didn't have anything for herself became the chief source of provision for God's man.

Now, I'll tell you what, it'd be hard to accept charity from somebody as needy as this woman was, and to say, well, you know, I know you're going to die, and I'm just taking your last food out of your hands, but trust me on this, you know, give me the food and you won't die. Now, she might have felt there's not much to lose. Might as well just do it anyway, because what's one more meal? It's not going to last that much longer.

Or she might have had real faith. I think it's better for us to assume that she trusted the word of the Lord, and said, okay, well, I'll trust you about that. If I give you food before I feed my son to me, then God will provide for me through this whole famine.

Now, that famine lasted probably another three years or so. It was three and a half years altogether. We don't know how long he sat by the brook before it dried up, but it was probably only a few months, so he probably had about three more years or more of famine, during which time, apparently, every time she went to the bin each morning to make bread, there was more flour there.

From where? Well, from God. It wasn't something that people were supplying or that she

was supplying. It was God's provision for her.

And so it was like when Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes. It's a multiplication of food. And that's a miracle.

When Jesus did that kind of thing, he was sort of doing the same kind of miracle that Elijah did here. Later on, Elisha did a similar thing when the sons of the prophets didn't have enough food for the whole group. They just went ahead and sat down to eat, and they cooked up what they had, and there ended up being enough for everybody more than naturally would have been there.

So the multiplication of food is something that God did in the Old Testament through Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus, of course, did also. But the thing about Jesus' miracles is that they do, most of them, have some kind of precedent in the Old Testament. Jesus said, If I'm not doing the works of my Father, then don't believe in me.

In other words, if I'm not doing the same kind of works that you know God does, then how would you know what kind he does? Well, he'd been doing them in the Old Testament, too. Jesus is saying, I'm doing the same works that my Father has always done. And so his miracles, although not identical, are in principle similar to miracles that God had done before, including the multiplication of food.

Elijah is the one through whom this happened for this woman. Now, Jesus made reference to this woman. He didn't mention her faith specifically, but I think her faith is implied in his statement.

In Luke chapter 4, when Jesus was preaching in his own hometown, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he said that the people of Nazareth would probably assume that he would do some of the same miracles among them that he had done in Capernaum and other places because Nazareth was his own hometown. He ought to perform for his neighbors and his friends at home if he's doing it for people away from home. And he said, You will likely say this to me, Physician, heal yourself.

This is Luke 4.23. He said, You will surely say this proverb to me, Physician, heal yourself. Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do here also in your country. Now, physician heal yourself means take care of your own family.

If you're taking care of everybody else, it's like a physician who's out healing all the sick, but his own family and himself are getting sick and being not cared for. The proverb would apply to him in this case where he's been doing his miracles for people all over the countryside, but he hasn't done any at home in Capernaum yet. Just like a physician needs to attend to his own home and his own family and his own needs, but may neglect them because he's taking care of everybody else.

So they said, Jesus may be doing, may be guilty of the same thing that he's taking care

of all the other towns. He hasn't taken care of any of the sicknesses and hasn't performed really for his own people, his own family at home. He says in verse 24, Assuredly I say to you, no profit is accepted in his own country.

But I tell you truly many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a great famine throughout all the land, but none of them, to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath in the region of Sidon, a woman who was a widow. And then he gives another example from the life of Elisha about naming the Syrian. The point he's making is that Elijah was in Israel, his own country, and there was a famine and there were many needy people in Israel.

Many widows needed help, but God didn't send Elijah to any of the Jewish or Israeli widows. He sent him to a Gentile outside his own country because a profit is not received in his own country. He had to go out of his own country to find someone who would receive his ministry, who would have faith, who would feed him even though she was desperately poor herself.

And what Jesus is saying is I don't expect to be well received in my own country either. I have to go elsewhere to do my miracles because my people don't, won't respect me in my own hometown the way that foreigners will. And so he makes reference to this woman implying that the reason that she was helped during this season and other widows who were actually Jewish widows or women in Israel were not helped was because this woman received the profit and the widows in Israel would not receive the profit.

He would not be received in his own country. This may have been true. It may be that Ahab and Jezebel had put out more or less an announcement that if anyone saw Elijah they should turn him in.

Especially as the famine grew greater as it seemed that he was the man who could call forth rain and rain was more desperately needed it would be to the king's advantage presumably to get Elijah in his hands find out where he was at least and maybe even you know torture him or threaten him or make him speak up and call for rain. So it may be that the widows and other people in Israel would have been unsafe. Realize that maybe they would have been loyal to the king or afraid of the king.

It would have turned Elijah over to him. So they wouldn't receive him Jesus said in his own country. So he was sent to a Gentile and so this becomes an example in Jesus' teaching of Gentile faith of the idea that even in the Old Testament a Gentile who had faith could receive blessing from God whereas Jews who didn't have faith would be passed over.

There were many of God's chosen people who probably died in that famine. But a Gentile

who was not one of God's chosen people became the recipient of God's blessing because she had faith where the others did not. Now verse 17 1st Kings 17, 17 Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick.

Now he had been starving when Elijah had shown up but now he had been able to at least stay alive by having a miraculous supply of food day by day but now he had something else threatening his life. He became sick and his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. Which is interesting it seems to be a way of saying he died of his sickness so it doesn't use the term that way.

I don't know if the writer is not quite sure whether to say he was dead or not or his breath left him maybe briefly and he seemed to be dead. So she said to Elijah What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to kill my son? And he said to her Give me your son. So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his own bed.

Now when his breath left him she was holding him in her arms it's possible that she was watching him fade and when his breath stopped that's when she came and brought him to Elijah and so whether he was dead or near dead or whatever we don't know how long his breath had stopped for and that's perhaps why the author doesn't commit himself to saying whether he was dead or not. He certainly was in danger of dying if he wasn't dead and he could well have been dead. All that is known was the external symptoms that he had stopped breathing.

So Elijah took him up and put him on his own bed. Then he cried out to the Lord and said O Lord my God, have you also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodged by killing her son? And he stretched himself on the child three times and cried out to the Lord and said O Lord my God, I pray let this child's soul come back to him. Now see here we have an interesting thing because it was a recognition that when a child died his soul left him.

There are many people who say that there is no separate soul that leaves the body and comes back but it was at least the belief of the ancients that the soul went away and came back. Now where it went they didn't know for sure. Sheol was the best answer they could give.

But they did know that the soul was gone and that the body was a container or a vehicle in which the soul lived during a lifetime. I bring this up because there are many today who say that the idea of a separate spirit and soul separate from the body is a Greek idea that came into the church through Greek philosophy and so forth. And they say there was no hint of that in the Old Testament.

Just a Greek idea that came up later when the Greek philosophy and language and culture permeated the Mediterranean world hundreds of years after this. But actually

Elijah believed that the child had a soul that had left and needed to come back. And so he prayed to God that the child's soul would come back to him.

And it says, Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah and the soul of the child came back to him and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, See your son lives.

Then the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is in your mouth and is the truth. So think of the kinds of miracles Elijah was doing. I mean, not all the prophets worked those kinds of miracles.

That nameless man of God who cursed the altar at Bethel, there was the supernatural prediction about Josiah. 300 years before Josiah would be born and mentions him by name. There was the prediction that the altar would split open and the ashes would come out.

There was the fact that Jeroboam had reached out to arrest him and his hand had withered. And then when the man of God prayed for him, his hand was restored. I mean, there were miracles done by some of these prophets.

But this kind of miracle, telling the rain to stop and then calling it back three and a half years later. There's not many prophets who exhibited that kind of authority, that kind of power. Jesus was able to tell the rain to stop.

The wind and the waves stopped when he commanded them to. But as far as ordinary men, you don't really find that going on. Joshua prayed for the sun to stop.

It's not entirely clear what happened there. We're told when it actually happened that there was never a day like it before or since when God hearkened to the voice of a man. But here we have a day like that.

Not a day, but a period of three and a half years that Elijah, you know, was in charge. God had put him in charge of the weather. And then God supernaturally provided for him day by day.

And then he used him to raise the dead. All this in the first chapter in which we are introduced to the man and there's more to come. So we see how God took care of Elijah.

And he didn't, you know, here's a man of great faith, but he didn't make him rich. You know, some people say, if you have faith, God will make you rich. Elijah was never rich, but he certainly had great faith.

In fact, his faith is the model for our praying, according to James. James said the fervent and effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much. And then he gives the example of Elijah.

He says, Elijah was a man of like passions as ourselves. And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. And it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

Then he prayed again and the heavens gave rain and the earth brought forth its fruit. That's in James chapter five. That's James 5, 17.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He prayed earnestly that it would, might not rain. And it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

Then he prayed again. We haven't read this part yet in the Old Testament and the heaven gave rain and the earth produced its fruit. So he's given as an example of a faithful man and he had a great faith and yet he didn't live prosperous life.

God provided for him day by day in the famine like everybody else. He had probably one meal a day or maybe two, one at morning, one at night, basic bread made of flour and oil, but he had enough and God took care of him. And he had no visible means of supply except God.

And God provided his daily bread, just like he provided for the children of Israel when they were in the wilderness with manna. He only gave them enough for each day and they couldn't store it up. They were supposed to trust God every day for their provision.

And so when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray and authorizes them to pray for their food, he says, pray this way, give us this day, our daily bread. And that's how God supplied for Elijah also. It should not be thought that if you have a lot of faith, even the faith to raise the dead as Elijah had, that God will prosper you in such a way as to make you a wealthy person, but he will provide your needs as long as he wants you to be a living.

And so living day by day by faith is what Elijah had to do. First the ravens brought him food and then the miracle of the wheat, the flour and the oil. Chapter 18.

Now it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year saying, go present yourself to Ahab and I will send rain on the earth. Now we just saw a moment ago in Luke 4 when Jesus was preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth and in James chapter 5, which we just read, that this famine or this drought was three years and six months. It actually doesn't give that exact figure here in the Old Testament, but both Jesus and James said so.

So they had information about it from somewhere. But we are told it was the third year and that God was now going to send rain. So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab and there was a severe famine in Samaria.

And Ahab had called Obadiah who was in charge of his house. Now Obadiah feared the

Lord greatly. For so it was while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord that Obadiah had taken 100 prophets and hidden them 50 to a cave and had fed them with bread and water.

That is the king's household always had some food even in the famine. If there was a little bit of food in the land, the king gets it in his household. Obadiah was in a privileged position.

He was the keeper of the king's house or whatever he was in charge of his house. And Obadiah unlike the king he served feared Yahweh. And so when the queen ordered the deaths of the prophets, he found a way to sustain them and snuck food out of the mansion, out of the palace, I should say, and fed them daily.

It was a meager diet, but that's the same thing Elijah was eating. It's just bread and water. Everyone was glad to have something like that.

And it says that Ahab called Obadiah not knowing of course that he was the man of God that he was. And verse 5 says, Ahab had said to Obadiah, go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks. Perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and the mules alive so that we will not have to kill any livestock.

So they divided the land between them to explore it. Ahab went one way by himself and Obadiah went another way by himself. Now it seems unlikely that these two men were traveling alone.

They probably had some kind of entourage, at least the king. We would expect the king wouldn't be out, you know, just searching for water all by himself. Unless we're to understand that times were much simpler back then and the king had much less of a retinue, much less of a, you know, heavy workload and everything than a modern king would have.

It's hard to imagine the king himself going out alone or even with others going out looking for water. But I guess when there's a famine there's not an awful lot more to do with your time. If you don't find water, you die.

And so that becomes the first order of business. Even the king goes about doing it. And he, Obadiah must have been a trusted, a very much trusted servant because he was told to do the same thing the king was doing.

They were both looking together for the water. And it says, Now as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him. And he recognized him and fell on his face and said, Is that you, O my lord Elijah? And he answered him, It is I. Go tell your master, Elijah is here.

Then he said, How have I sinned that you are delivering your servant up to the hand of

Ahab to kill me? As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you. And when they said he is not here, he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. And now you say, Go tell your master Elijah is here, and it shall come to pass as soon as I am gone from you that the spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know.

So when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth. Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord's prophets fifty to a cave and fed them with bread and water? And now you say, Go tell your master Elijah is here, and he will kill me.

Then Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts lives before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah. So, Obadiah for some reason believed that the Holy Spirit would just call Elijah away spontaneously.

In a way, that's what did kind of happen at the end of Elijah's life. You know, the whirlwind came and carried him away. And so he was considered to be a mysterious man.

That God whisked him away places and or led him to do things that were unpredictable. No doubt Obadiah thought that even if Elijah didn't intend to disappear, that the Holy Spirit would just take him somewhere, maybe without Elijah even anticipating it. And he would not be there when Ahab would come back.

And then Ahab would feel like he had been mocked by Obadiah and his anger would kill him. But notice Ahab had sent to all the surrounding countries messengers saying, Where is Elijah the prophet? Is he there? And if the country said, We haven't seen him. He made them take an oath, you know, with probably some kind of self-imposed curse upon them if they were lying.

He was very serious about finding him. Now, how come he couldn't find him? I'm not sure. It may be that he had not sent to Sidon.

To the Sidonians. Because that's where Jezebel was from and he may have thought that's the last place Elijah would go. You know, Elijah is going to go some safe place to hide.

He's not going to go up into Sidon where, you know, he's a sitting duck to be arrested by my father-in-law, the king. And so he apparently did not search that region quite so thoroughly. And maybe that's why God had him go there.

Had him go to the place that seemed most dangerous. Because as it turned out, it's counterintuitive that it'd be safe there, but it'd be safer because Ahab would assume that

he wouldn't go there. And so he searched all the places that would have been safer places.

And by being in the most dangerous place, Elijah turned out to be in the safest place because it was not searched. And it happened when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, Is that you, O troubler of Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, and that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel.

The 450 prophets of Baal, and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table. Now, of course, Ahab was kind of at Elijah's mercy. And remember, Ahab was not a strong king.

He was mainly ruled by a very strong queen. And we'll see that through his whole story. He's just kind of a sniveling, wimpy kind of a guy who just, he inherited the throne, and he doesn't have much willpower, doesn't have much spine.

He'll even repent from time to time, briefly, but in a half-hearted way. He just doesn't have any backbone or character. And although he speaks to Elijah strongly, and says, Oh, you're the troubler of Israel.

Of course, it's a ridiculous thing to say, although it did seem to Ahab that way, because Elijah seemed to be the one who was holding back the rain. But obviously, Elijah wasn't controlling the rain, God was. Elijah was just God's servant.

So what Elijah said was not something that had anything to do with Elijah's volition. It had to do with what God had told him to say. And God was judging Israel because of Ahab, not because of Elijah.

Ahab was the troubler of Israel for introducing and sponsoring Baal worship in Israel. And so when Elijah said, Go call your prophets of Baal and your prophets of Asherah to meet me in Mount Carmel, Ahab, being a rather spineless fellow, just complied. Here's a prophet dressed in a hairy garment with a leather belt and, you know, a Nazarite in all likelihood with long hair and long beard.

You know, a scruffy looking character giving orders to the king and the king just does what he says. But then the king just did what his wife says and what other people said too, for the most part. So Ahab sent for the children of Israel, all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel.

Now apparently Jezebel didn't come there for some reason. She was busy or something but she was not there. She only heard about this later.

And Elijah came to all the people and said, How long will you falter between two

opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow him. But if Baal, then follow him. But the people answered him not a word.

You see, Israel still was in a sense professing or thinking of themselves as the people of Yahweh to a large degree. But it was illegal. Jezebel had basically outlawed Yahwism and killed the prophets of Yahweh and had instituted Baal worship as the official religion of the country.

But not everybody was on board with that. And they wouldn't want to speak up against it. If you say, Well, who's God here? Yahweh or Baal? Well, if they said Yahweh, they knew they'd have to look over and see if they're going to get arrested.

Look over at Ahab. You're going to arrest me for this because I say Yahweh's God. But if they said Baal was God and they didn't really believe it or they weren't sure, they didn't want to risk enraging Yahweh.

After all, it was he who was holding back the rain and making them starve. They knew Elijah was the man of Yahweh. And so they didn't want to denounce Yahweh or Baal.

And so they were kind of on the horns of Adelmanus, so they didn't answer anything at all. And it says, Then Elijah said to the people, I alone am left of the prophets of Yahweh. But Baal's prophets are 450 men.

Plus there were 400 prophets of Asherah, the goddess. So there were 850 false prophets in Israel. And Elijah was the only outspoken prophet of God, although there were 100 of them hiding in caves somewhere.

Therefore let them give us two bulls and let them choose one bull for themselves. Cut it in pieces and lay it on wood, but put no fire under it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire under it.

Now he's saying, this is going to be expensive so I want them to provide both bulls. There's only one of me and there's 450 of them. Let them come up with both animals and they can prepare one and I'll prepare the other.

We'll make it all ready for sacrifice. Put wood and stuff under it, but we won't put a fire. Then you call on the name of your gods and I will call on the name of Yahweh.

And the God who answers by fire, He is God. So all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. I'm sure.

I mean that would be really interesting to see that kind of contest take place. They like the idea. After all, the worst thing that can happen is nothing happens.

But if something happens, that would be really an interesting thing to see. So they all were favorable and Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose one bull for yourselves

and prepare it first for you or many and call on the name of your God but put no fire under it. So they took the bull which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us.

But there was no voice. No one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they had made.

So you can just picture you guys dancing and leaping and you know, trying to get the attention of their God who's not there not paying attention. And so it was at noon that Elijah mocked them and said, Cry aloud, for he is a God. Either he's meditating or he is busy or he's on a journey.

Or perhaps he's sleeping and must be awakened. So they cried aloud and cut themselves as was their custom with knives and lances until the blood gushed out on them. This was a fairly common thing in some pagan religions for the worshippers and priests to cut themselves just to show their sincerity.

This modern practice of piercing and cutting themselves among our young people I sometimes wonder if it's a resurgence although not in their own thinking but a resurgence of the same demonic spirit that inspired people to hurt themselves and cut themselves through this worship of false gods. Anyway, that's what they were doing. Their blood was gushing out thinking that would get Baal's attention.

And it was so when midday was past that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice but there was no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention. So they were all day there from the morning until noon and then at noon he started mocking them so they got more vociferous and more agitated and more animated and more extreme in their ways of trying to get Baal's attention but no one listened, no one answered, there was no voice, there was no response. And now it's the time of the evening sacrifice.

There's not very much time for Elijah to do his gig but actually he didn't need very much time. Then Elijah said to all the people, come near to me. So all the people came near to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.

Apparently there was already an old altar there. That may be why he had chosen the spot for the contest. So he repaired that altar and Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob to whom the word of the Lord had come saying Israel shall be your name.

And with these stones he built an altar in the name of Yahweh and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two sals of seed. Apparently a large volume. And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood and said, fill four water pots with water and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.

Then he said, do it a second time. And they did it a second time. Then he said, do it a third time.

So they had twelve water pots with water were poured over this. So the water ran all around the altar and he also filled the trench with water. So he was making sure that he gave himself no advantages in the natural.

The sacrifice was saturated with water. The wood to burn it was now soaking wet and so much water had run down that it filled the trench around the altar. In other words, there's no way that this could be faked.

If there's going to be fire, there's nothing conducive to that in the natural. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice that Elijah the prophet came near and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God and Israel and that I am your servant and that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me that this people may know that you are the Lord God and that you have turned their hearts back to you again.

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the dust and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now, when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, Yahweh, He is God. Yahweh, He is God.

And Elijah said to them, Seize the prophets of Baal. Do not let one of them escape. So they seized them and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there, which is what should have been done to them long ago because the law of Moses said that anyone who worships other gods should be put to death.

These men were practicing a capital crime in Israel as a profession and now they got what they deserved. They got executed. Now, Elijah was obviously in the bargaining position here.

I mean, everyone could see he could call fire out of heaven and he later did. Later in his life in 2 Kings he actually called fire out of heaven on troops that came to arrest him. Imagine this man.

We're not reading mythology here. We're reading a real man who heard from God so much that he knew that he could just pray a prayer like that and fire from heaven would come down. Now, I've known Christians who seem to be that confident in their prayers before but very seldom have there been the demonstration that they were right.

And I'll tell you what, I've seen God answer prayers in mighty ways, in my case a number of times. But I've also seen plenty of times when he didn't and I don't know if there'd be very many situations where I'd be so confident as to put my neck on the line like Elijah's here. Let's gather all Israel here.

We'll let the prophets of Baal show what Baal can do. Then I'll show you what Yahweh can do. But, how do I know he's going to come through? How do I know he's going to do it? Well, no doubt Elijah had been told by God to set up this contest so Elijah who was a man of great faith knew that God was going to do this.

But even so, consider this man was an ordinary Jewish man, presumably, at one point in his life. Growing up as a boy and teenager and young man we don't know how old he was at this point but he'd lived a lot of his life, no doubt as an ordinary devout Jew. And at some point the word of the Lord came to him, apparently right at the very beginning of this story about him in chapter 17.

We don't know that he had a career as a prophet before. It doesn't even call him Elijah the prophet it calls him Elijah the Tishbite. You know, it's not even so much that he was a known prophet before this time but God came and says listen, you go tell Ahab that it's not going to... and he believed it and he went and he did what God said and, you know, he made all these predictions about supernatural things that were going to happen.

It's not going to rain until I say so. You know, the flour and the oil is not going to run out as long as, you know, as long as I say. You know, and in this case God's going to bring fire from heaven.

I don't know, I just always try to put myself in the shoes of a man like that. How did he what was it like that the first time God spoke to him in such a way that he was so sure that these miraculous things were going to happen. I don't, you know, I always like to think about that because ever since I went into the ministry I've always wanted to sort of relate with these men of God and how the Holy Spirit spoke to them and stuff and understand how that feels and how that works.

I remember there was a time when I was playing in a Christian evangelistic band and we were in Santa Cruz about 1982 I guess it was. We had this flood. It rained solidly for a few weeks.

The power was out in Santa Cruz because a bridge had been taken out that had power lines taking the power from one side to the other. We had a complete blackout for over a week before they could repair it. It was just pouring down rain.

It did not cease to rain a moment for at least two weeks. Our band had a commitment to come to this youth facility, prison. It was not a maximum security place but it was a place where young men were locked up because of their crimes and one of the guys in our band had a connection with the chaplain there and got us assigned to come in there and minister there which we were looking forward to doing but the rain was really unexpected.

We hadn't expected when we made the commitment that it would be so much rain

because you had to cross a large grass area carrying our amplifiers, our equipment and stuff that was uncovered. You could only park some distance from the building and then you had to walk over a big lawn to get the equipment into the building and there was no covering or anything to protect from the rain. We had all our stuff in a pickup truck with a tarp over it to keep it dry.

There was a guard there who did not like us. He didn't like Christians and he was kind of a sarcastic, you know, smirky kind of a guy who just would make snide remarks about Christians and so forth. We got there and our truck with our equipment was out in the parking lot covered with a tarp and I was looking at the situation and thinking, how can we get our amplifiers across this large stretch of lawn without ruining everything in the rain? And I went up on foot with an umbrella and was talking to this guard.

I said, you know, I don't think we can get our equipment in here easily without getting it all ruined in the rain. Isn't there a more covered area or some other access to the building where we can park the truck and bring the stuff in? And he was real smiley and smirky and sarcastic. He said, nope, you have to do it right here.

It's the only access. So I said, well, the rain will ruin the equipment. And he said, well, what are you going to do? I wasn't sure what to do.

I said, well, I guess we'll just have to pray that it won't rain. We'll have to pray that it'll stop raining. And so I went back out to our truck with our guys and I said, we don't have any other way to bring the equipment in, so we need to pray that the rain will stop.

It's been raining incessantly for two weeks and flooding. There have been people killed in some of the intersections that were low, that were filled with water, cars driving not knowing how deep it was, and they die in there. I mean, this is a really, this is the Love Creek floods in 1982 in Santa Cruz, and we had had no break in the rain at all.

We're out in Watsonville at this facility. And so we stood by the truck and we prayed and we asked God to stop the rain so that we could get the equipment in. And when we stopped praying, the rain had stopped.

And so we uncovered the tarp and we carried the equipment in and we played and we did ministry and so forth. And when we were done, we carried the equipment back out, put the tarp back on, and it started raining again. And it kept raining for days after that.

And we just had a probably couple hours of no rain. It started as soon as we prayed and it ended as soon as we were safe again. And that was really awesome to me.

I'd never seen that happen before since quite so dramatically. But I didn't tell the guy, God's going to stop the rain. We're going to go ask God to stop the rain and the rain's going to stop.

I didn't have that kind of faith. You know, I didn't have that kind of confidence. Elijah did.

He could say, it's going to stop raining because I said so. I mean, I know that God can do that. God can answer those kinds of prayers.

And we did pray and it did happen, but I don't know what it'd be like to be so sure of yourself, so sure that God has spoken to you and that what... I'm just trying to think of how dynamic this man's connection with God had to be that he had that kind of certainty that he'd stand before the whole nation and say, okay, now I'm putting my neck on the block here. God, you know, I'm your servant. I'm going to show these people that you're really God and anticipate that fire from heaven would come down and it did.

Elijah had a lot of encouragement to his faith. You know, I mean, he saw so many miracles and it's so rare. The time of Elijah and Elisha was a time of frequent miracles through them.

But most of Israel's history there weren't a lot of miracles. There were a lot of miracles at the time of Moses and Joshua but then there were really hundreds of years in which you might have one or two miracles recorded during a whole season of several centuries. Very rare.

But in Elijah's time and Elisha's there was just one miracle after another through these men, which means it was a significant time for Israel because they had the very worst king yet and Israel was definitely in danger of being wiped out by God if they didn't repent. So, some very mighty prophets were sent to help them see the need to repent but it didn't work. Israel did not repent.

It might seem like they did here because the people said Yahweh he is God, Yahweh he is God. Yeah, well they had a great moment of inspiration at that time but they were still not serving God and Ahab and Jezebel were the ones who were calling the plays and still enforcing Baal worship so nothing really changed except that God gave a witness of himself to these people so that they were without excuse. He showed that the prophets of Baal had no power because Baal had no existence and that Yahweh did.

So, Elijah exploits the situation where he's got a moment of favor in the side of these people and he said okay grab those prophets and kill them and so he managed to purge Israel of the prophets of Baal for the time being. Then Elijah said to Ahab verse 41, go up eat and drink for there is the sound of abundance of rain. In other words, this food shortage is going to be over so eat as much as you want, drink as much as you want.

You've been storing up food probably rationing it out in small amounts for your meals because you don't know when it will run out. Well, rain is coming. Therefore, go ahead and eat to your heart's content.

You can eat at your food stores because you're not going to run out now because there's

a sound of abundance of rain. So Ahab went up to eat and drink and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. Then he bowed down on the ground and put his face between his knees and he said to his servant go up now, look toward the sea.

He's looking to see if there's any clouds because there hadn't been any clouds for three and a half years and they needed rain now. He had just announced that there's rain coming but Elijah himself realized that things still had to be prayed for even if God had said he's going to do them they're going to come through prayer. So he prayed and he sent his servant to see is there any evidence of rain? Any evidence of clouds? Go look toward the sea maybe there's something coming in from offshore.

So he went up and he looked and he said there's nothing and seven times he said go again. So Elijah kept praying for the same thing. I mean his reputation and God's reputation were on the line.

He'd said God's sending rain and he's prayed six times now and his servant keeps coming back saying nope nothing there. I mean how long do you keep praying? When do you figure oops maybe I heard God wrong. Maybe this isn't going to happen.

But seven times the man came back and said nope but he kept saying go again. Then it came to pass the seventh time that he said there is a cloud as small as a man's hand rising up out of the sea. So it's just very very very slight encouragement.

It's only about the size of a man's hand from the way I can see it from here. Looks like it's coming up out of the sea. Probably coming up over the horizon from the west.

And although it looked very small Elijah said this is it. This is the answer to the prayer. It's coming.

So he said go up. Say to Ahab prepare your chariot and go down before the rain stops you. Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind and there was a heavy rain.

So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel which is where Jezebel happened to be at the time. And so apparently he ate there at Mount Carmel because Elijah encouraged him. He said no food shortage anymore.

Go ahead and eat. But then he said okay the rain is coming now. You better get in your shirt and get wherever you're going to be because otherwise you're going to be in the mud.

You'll be bogged down. The rain is coming. And it says then the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah and he girded up his loins and he ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Now the way this is worded it sounds like he outran the horses and the chariots that Ahab was riding and apparently he did. Apparently he did. That the spirit of the Lord or the hand of the Lord came upon him and he apparently could outrun a horse because they both started from the same place when he said go, you better go home before the rain catches up with you.

And so Ahab jumps in his chariot and runs and then rides his horse. Elijah just runs on foot and beats him there. Gets there faster than the horses.

It reminds me of what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah chapter 12 when the prophet was complaining to God and saying why are things so bad and you're not doing anything to remedy them. But God spoke to him in verse 5. Jeremiah 12 5 says if you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace in which you trusted they wearied you how will you do in the flooding of the Jordan? Now this is not any reference to Elijah at all but when it says if you've run with the footmen and they've wearied you how will you do when you have to run against horses? The idea is many a man can run successfully in a race with footmen but who can run faster than horses? And the trials you're facing now he's saying to Jeremiah are small things compared to the ones that are coming. Right now you may be weary from just enduring the hardships you're facing but the weirdness you're facing is from trials that are comparable to just running in a race where you have to put out all your exertion, you have to be strong you have to be fast but you still are only running against other men on foot.

But the trials that are yet to come you're going to feel that you're running against horses. Now men cannot outrun horses, not naturally only supernaturally. And so what I think God's saying to Jeremiah is the only way that you'll be able to endure the trials to come is through the supernatural grace of God being given to you.

As Paul said that he had prayed three times that God would take away his thorn and God said my grace is sufficient for you. I'll give you strength in this situation. If you are facing trials that are difficult but do not receive or require supernatural strength to overcome them then you might trust in your own strength in them.

And if you do then the trials will come that you can't trust in your own strength for. Things that are too severe that you can't naturally handle. And so Jeremiah is being told you're having trouble with the trials you're having now and they don't even require supernatural aid.

How are you going to do when you have to run against horses? Well, Elijah is an example of a man who ran against horses and he won but he was doing it through the power of God. The hand of God came upon him and he outran Ahab's chariots and his horses. And that's of course the way that one is expected if they're a godly person to handle their trials is by the hand of the Lord.

The power of God given. That is the Christian life is supposed to be a supernatural life. Now we don't see much of the kind of supernatural that we see in Elijah.

Calling fire out of heaven and stopping the rain and outrunning horses and so forth. His special miracles are no doubt intended to be exceptional. But he lived a supernatural life.

That's the point. He lived a life in an age of apostasy when everyone else was turning from God. He was in touch with God and God sustained him.

Both his need for food his need for travel. He could outrun the chariots. God supernaturally everything about his life seemed to be supernatural.

And that's really how the Christian life is supposed to be. Not necessarily always miraculous supernatural but supernatural in the sense that the grace of God is what we trust in all the time. So that even frankly when we have to run against footmen we should not be trusting in our own strength.

Even if we can pull it off. Even if we have small trials that we think we can handle. That's not what we're supposed to be doing.

We're not supposed to handle them ourselves. We're supposed to trust God and depend on God. Depend on the grace of God.

Depend on the spirit of God to enable us in the small stuff as well as the big stuff. Because then if we're already accustomed to trusting in God then when the big stuff hits then we're already we're already trusting God and he'll give more grace as more as needed. I remember when my wife was killed how the grace of God just seemed to be instantly there.

I didn't even have to pray for it. It's like when I was told that my wife was dead I just felt the grace of God cover me and uphold me and I remember marveling that I thought well I didn't even have to pray for this God's grace just was upon me and it was a big trial but it was I was floating I was floating on the grace of God like a wave or submerged under a wave of grace but as I look back I thought well why is it that that just came so naturally without even seeking it and I realized that it was because that's what I was doing in my life already. I mean I wasn't going for any big trials before that happened but I was I had a habit of just you know living by faith really just trusting God for everything and grace comes through faith and because of the habit of trusting God at the times when there weren't great trials I think God honored that and it was more natural really for me to just trust God in a big one too and God gave more grace as it was needed.

I believe that whether we're in big trials or small or none that we're not supposed to be living our lives in our natural strength anyway. We're supposed to be living walking in the spirit walking in the spirit means living by the power of the spirit and that's it's

harder to remember to do that when we don't think we need to when the things we face every day are just normal things that a person can handle then we just figure I don't need any special help from God about this. I'm you know I'm up I'm a big enough man to handle this but I believe God wants us to you know come to Him daily moment by moment to seek His enabling even in times when it doesn't seem like a person would need to have special supernatural assistance.

Our whole life is to be lived in the spirit depending on God and if that's our habit then you know running with the footman may be somewhat difficult because even with the grace of God trials are hard but if you're trusting in the word in the power of God and your trials are like running against a foot race against people then when you have to actually run against horses the power of God will still be there and you'll be accustomed to looking to that instead of your own strength which is what has to be the case I think if we're going to live the Christian life successfully because we haven't really had big trials in this country. I mean individually some of us have had large trials but we haven't had a huge societal trials where our whole country is facing famine or war or anything like that on our soil. Things where everybody is suffering and where you really need to have supernatural sustenance to stay you know strong but those times could come and you know in times when we don't have that happening a lot of times we just become flabby and we don't feel like we need God and when we don't feel like we need God we kind of just drift away from God so you know Elijah was able to outrun horses because he was able to he was living his whole life in the supernatural realm anyway his experience was a supernatural life and while I don't think that all the miracles that he did are typical of what all Christians are supposed to be doing at all times they are a demonstration that he wasn't living a natural life he was living a supernatural life and therefore if he had to run against horses, well he could do that too he could do anything that God wanted him to do because he wasn't really trusting in himself at all he was a man of faith, trusting in God and his story is very exciting as we shall see as we go on there's more yet, yet he was a man of like passions as we are and that's something that James points out Elijah was not Superman he was an ordinary man who trusted in God, that's just the point that James is making just like any of us, only he trusted God well so can we and that's what James encourages us to think is that as a man who's ordinary can pray and stop the rain for three and a half years and then pray and have it come back if it's the will of God of course you can't just make up your prayers and make up just pray whatever thing you want but if you're close to God and you know what God wants and you've got the faith then you're in the same position Elijah's in you've got the same God and he was no more superhuman than you are, but he lived a supernatural life which is I believe a model for Christians and we'll of course get more opportunities to watch him in action in the later chapters but at this point we must stop