

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 11B

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION

Who was Elijah? His background is not made known to us other than the fact that he was of the inhabitants of Gilead as verse 1 reveals. It is as if God is telling us that the person's origin is not important in His service. The most important factor in all the servants of God is obedience. They must do all that God commands them.

Whether they agreed with God or not or whether what was asked of them was logical or illogical to human thinking is not the issue. They were to do exactly what God asked of them and were not to add or subtract. This is of utmost importance! In fact it is so important in the prophet's ministry that if he were to do anything else he would immediately be regarded as a false prophet.

Elijah went immediately to King Ahab to rebuke him. This was the concern of God for the Northern Kingdom despite the mess they had gotten themselves into. God never gives up on His own even though His own has given up on Him. This chapter illustrates what 2 Timothy 2:11-13

says, *"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."* [Emphasis added]

We see in this chapter the courage of a prophet of God. He was not a super-believer but an ordinary believer like everyone else. He had passions just like ours. He struggled with fear and yet he overcame his fears to stand before the king and spoke the word of God without flinching. He obeyed God and did everything that God commanded even though he was fearful. Courage is not the absence of fear but overcoming fear to do God's will.

OUTLINE

1. Introduction of God's prophet of fire and judgement and his flee to the brook Cherith (vv.1-7);
2. Elijah went to Zarephath in Sidon to help a widow (vv.8-16);
3. Elijah raised the widow's son from the dead (vv.17-24).

COMMENTARY

Elijah Fled and Hid Himself – 17:1-7

Elijah suddenly appeared on the scene. His name is a combination of two names: "El" and "Yah" meaning "My God is Yahweh". It is a powerful Name. Truly the prophet Elijah lived up to this powerful name. He will always

be remembered for the great fiery miracles that he did in his life time.

He came from an area in Gilead, which was located east of the River Jordan. The LORD sent him on a mission to speak to Ahab. This simple beginning started a long series of confrontations between King Ahab and Elijah and, with the king's wife Jezebel playing a significant role.

Ahab was a very impious king. The spiritual decline of the king and the nation was so great that the future of Israel's relationship with God was on the line. Ahab had to be warned. Elijah went to Ahab unannounced and declared that there would be neither dew nor rain until he gave the word. Elijah drew his authority and power from the LORD (YAHWEH) whom he served (17:1). The elements of dew and rain were targeted because Baal was the Canaanite god of rain and fertility. The people believed that Baal gave them the rain and the grain in the fields. So the stage was set for the confrontation between Baal and the LORD. Israel had hyphenated Baal worship with the worship of Jehovah. The LORD wanted to make clear that the distinction between Baal and the LORD is as that between Heaven and Hell. There must never be a mixture in the worship of the LORD. It is ALL God or none at all!

Just as suddenly as Elijah appeared, he likewise disappeared. Immediately after delivering the message to Ahab, the LORD told him to go eastward and hide by the brook Cherith on the west bank of Jordan. The drought would occur in the land

and for as long as the LORD determines, Elijah would drink water out of the stream. And for meat, the LORD would command the ravens to feed him¹. So Elijah lived by the brook Cherith from which he drew water. Twice daily, the ravens brought bread and meat for him. This was indeed a miracle.

This was to demonstrate without a shadow of doubt that Baal was a helpless and useless god whereas the LORD is all powerful! The life of Israel is in the land. Without water the land suffers and dies. The LORD is the LORD of the land of Israel, and not Baal! Israel's very existence depends upon the LORD, not Baal! Do not worship Baal but return to the LORD! The worship of Baal is vanity! The worship of the LORD is reality!

If the LORD had not provided water and food for Elijah the way He did, the message would not have been that clear. Do you agree?

Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath – 17:8-16

Not long after, the brook dried up because of the lack of rain. Then, the LORD instructed Elijah to go northwest to Zarephath in Sidon, the heart of Baal worship. It was also the home town of Jezebel. When he reached there, Elijah was to meet a widow who would provide him with food. Once again Elijah trusted the

¹ Ravens belong to the crow family, which includes the magpie. The size of some of these ravens is quite impressive, measuring 55-65 cm. They have powerful beaks and are well known in the ancient world.

LORD and made his journey to Zarephath. On reaching the gate of the city, he found the widow gathering some sticks. Elijah politely asked her for a drink of water. As she started to fetch the water, Elijah called her and asked for some bread to eat as well. Upon hearing that, the widow, recognising that Elijah was a Jew, said (17:12): *“As the LORD (YAHWEH) 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.”*

This was a pitiful situation. We note that the widow referred to YAHWEH. Upon hearing this, Elijah told her to “Fear not” and to go ahead and do what she wanted to do, but to make a little cake first for him, and after that for herself and her son (17:13). Elijah said that the LORD promised that the supply of oil in the cruse and grain in the barrel would not be empty. This probably sounded far-fetched. There was famine in Sidon as well, where Baal was worshipped but Baal had been powerless to alleviate the hardship.

But the widow followed Elijah’s instructions. This act of faith of the widow testifies that she was probably a believer. This is an illustration of Mark 8:35-37, *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in*

exchange for his soul?” She was holding in her hands the last meal for her and her son but she gave it to Elijah. If she had held on to it, she and her son would have “lived” for the moment but would ultimately die. But because she gave her last meal to Elijah she lived for eternity!

The result was that *“she and he, and her house, did eat many days”* (17:15). The supply of grain did not deplete and the supply of oil did not stop flowing! This was an example of how faith in God could accomplish all things. In order for faith to work, it must be accompanied by action. This is the second miracle.

Elijah Raised the Widow’s Son From the Dead – 17:17-24

Not long after, the widow’s son fell ill and died. She went straight to Elijah. She recognised that Elijah was a man of God or one who was sent by God. She accused him of deceiving her and said that God had sent Elijah to punish her for her sin. (17:18). It was not revealed what her sin was. Elijah did not defend himself but took her son from her and carried him upstairs to his own bed. There was nothing Elijah could do but cry to the LORD. He poured out his heart and soul to the LORD, reasoning with Him that surely He did not send him to the widow to bring this terrible sorrow and grief upon her. He then stretched himself three times over the boy and cried to the LORD (17:21b): *“O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s soul come into him again.”* The LORD heard Elijah’s prayer and the child regained his soul and was alive again!

Elijah then took the child back to his mother. The woman said to Elijah (17:24): *“Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.”* This was the third miracle. The witness of the widow concerning Elijah at this point was very significant. This doubly encouraged and assured Elijah that the LORD was with him and that He could be trusted even for the impossible. God seemed to be testing and training Elijah for a bigger battle of faith ahead. By this time, the widow was probably also a true believer of the LORD (YAHWEH).

PRACTICAL VALUE

Elijah needed tremendous faith to say what he said to King Ahab. He believed the LORD who sent Him that He would do what He had asked him to say! What “if” it did not come to pass, would doubts enter into our minds concerning the many promises in the Bible? Doubt is one of the believer’s greatest enemies! It has led many into the path of sin and waywardness. Do not doubt God. He will keep His perfect Word.

The sad fact is that there was no faith in Israel. This was contrasted by Jesus Himself when he testified in Luke 4:25-26, *“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a*

widow.” Miracles reveal the lack of or the possession of faith in the person!

When the LORD calls us to do a special task, He will definitely provide whatever is needed to see us through. God proved this in the life of Elijah. God not only provided for his physical needs, He provided the testing and training to assure Elijah of His complete trustworthiness. God miraculously provided for him through the ravens and the poor widow of Zarephath. Elijah learned that there was nothing too hard for God. Elijah’s faith needed to be strengthened. So does ours. Trust and obey for “with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). AMEN

DAILY READINGS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 1 Kings 17:1-7; James 5:17, 18; Isaiah 55:10, 11

TUESDAY: 1 Kings 17:8-24; Luke 9:28-31; Jeremiah 32:17.

WEDNESDAY: 1 Kings 17:1-24

THURSDAY: 1 Kings 17:1-24

FRIDAY: 1 Kings 17:1-24

Discussion Questions

1. What happens if the LORD had not provided water and food for Elijah and he suffered together with the rest of Israel? What is the clear message sent to Ahab when the LORD gave water and food to Elijah and not Ahab and Israel?

2. What was the issue that required Elijah to speak with King Ahab?

3. What did Elijah experience at the brook Cherith? What do you think Elijah learned from it?

4. Did it make sense to Elijah that God sent him to the widow in Zarephath to be provided for by her? What lessons can we learn from this?

5. Do you believe that Jesus is coming again soon? How do you demonstrate this belief in practical ways?

6. Do you believe that God can raise someone from the dead? Do you believe that God can provide for all your needs and that of your family

as well? Are you afraid of losing your job or of your husband losing his job? Is that why some people compromise in their work place in order to keep their jobs?

7. What principles can we draw from this chapter on the issue of “living by faith”?
