
1KINGS 17: 1 Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the foreigners of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

Elijah's message to Ahab concerning the three years' drought, 1Kgs 17:1. He is commanded to go to the brook Cherith; where he is fed by ravens, 1Kgs 17:2-7. He afterwards goes to a widow's house at Zarephath, and miraculously multiplies her meal and oil, 1Kgs 17:8-16. Her son dies, and Elijah restores him to life, 1Kgs 17:17-24.

Verse 1

Elijah the Tishbite - The history of this great man is introduced very abruptly; his origin is enveloped in perfect obscurity. He is here said to be a Tishbite. Tishbeh, says Calmet, is a city beyond Jordan, in the tribe of Gad, and in the land of Gilead. Who was his father, or from what tribe he sprang, is not intimated; he seems to have been the prophet of Israel peculiarly, as we never find him prophesying in Judah. A number of apocryphal writers have trifled at large about his parentage, miraculous birth, of his continual celibacy, his academy of the prophets, etc., etc., all equally worthy of credit. One opinion, which at first view appears strange, bears more resemblance to truth than any of the above, viz., that he had no earthly parentage known to any man; that he was an angel of God, united for a time to a human body, in order to call men back to perfect purity, both in doctrine and manners, from which they had totally swerved. His Hebrew name, which we have corrupted into Elijah and Elias, is אליהו Alihu, or, according to the vowel points, Eliyahu; and signifies he is my God. Does this give countenance to the supposition that this great personage was a manifestation in the flesh of the Supreme Being? He could not be the Messiah; for we find him with Moses on the mount of transfiguration with Christ. The conjecture that he was an angel seems countenanced by the manner of his departure from this world; yet, in Jam 5:17, he is said to be a man ὁμοιοπαθῆς, of like passions, or rather with real human propensities: this, however, is irreconcilable with the conjecture.

There shall not be dew nor rain these years - In order to remove the abruptness of this address, R. S. Jarchi dreams thus: - "Elijah and Ahab went to comfort Hiel in his grief, concerning his sons. And Ahab said to Elijah, Is it possible that the curse of Joshua, the son of Nun, who was only the servant of Moses, should be fulfilled; and the curse of Moses, our teacher, not be fulfilled; who said, Deu 11:16, Deu 11:17 : If ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them, then the Lord's wrath shall be kindled against you; and he will shut up the heaven that there be no rain? Now all the Israelites serve other gods, and yet the rain is not withheld. Then Elijah 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." This same mode of connecting this and the preceding chapter, is followed by the Jerusalem and Babylonish Talmuds, Sedar Olam, Abarbanel, etc.

1KINGS 17: 2 the LORD's word came to him, saying,

1KINGS 17: 3 "Go away from here, turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is before the Jordan.

Verse 3

Hide thyself by the brook Cherith - This brook, and the valley through which it ran, are supposed to have been on the western side of Jordan, and not far from Samaria. Others suppose it to have been on the eastern side, because the prophet is commanded to go eastward, 1Kgs 17:3. It was necessary, after such a declaration to this wicked and idolatrous king, that he should immediately hide himself; as, on the first drought, Ahab would undoubtedly seek his life. But what a proof was this of the power of God, and the vanity of idols! As God's prophet prayed, so there was rain or drought; and all the gods of Israel could not reverse it! Was not this sufficient to have converted all Israel?

1KINGS 17: 4 It shall be, that you shall drink of the brook. I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

Verse 4

I have commanded the ravens to feed thee - Thou shalt not lack the necessaries of life; thou shalt be supplied by an especial providence.

See more on this subject at the end of the chapter, 1Kgs 17:24 (note).

1KINGS 17: 5 So he went and did according to the LORD's word; for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, that is before the Jordan.

1KINGS 17: 6 The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

Verse 6

And the ravens brought him bread and flesh - The Septuagint, in the Codex Vaticanus, and some ancient fathers, read the passage thus: - Καὶ οἱ κορακεὶς ἔφερον αὐτῷ ἄρτους τὸ πρῶν, καὶ κρεὰ τὸ δεῖλην, And the crows brought him bread in the morning, and flesh in the evening; but all the other versions agree with the Hebrew text. This is the first account we have of flesh-meat breakfasts and flesh-meat suppers; and as this was the food appointed by the Lord for the sustenance of the prophet, we may naturally conjecture that it was the food of the people at large.

1KINGS 17: 7 After a while, the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

Verse 7

The brook dried up - Because there had been no rain in the land for some time, God having sent this drought as a testimony against the idolatry of the people: see Deu 11:16, Deu 11:17.

1KINGS 17: 8 the LORD's word came to him, saying,

1KINGS 17: 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain you."

Verse 9

Get thee to Zarephath - This was a town between Tyre and Sidon, but nearer to the latter, and is therefore called in the text Zarephath which belongeth to Sidon; or, as the Vulgate and other versions express it, Sarepta of the Sidonians. Sarepta is the name by which it goes in the New Testament; but its present name is Sarphan. Mr. Maundrell, who visited it, describes it as consisting of a few houses only on the tops of the mountains; but supposes that it anciently stood in the plain below, where there are still ruins of a considerable extent.

1KINGS 17: 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath; and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks: and he called to her, and said, "Please get me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink."

1KINGS 17: 11 As she was going to get it, he called to her, and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

1KINGS 17: 12 She said, "As the LORD your God lives, I don't have a cake, but a handful of meal in the jar, and a little oil in the jar. Behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and bake it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

Verse 12

A handful of meal in a barrel - The word כד cad is to be understood as implying an earthen jar; not a wooden vessel, or barrel of any kind. In the East they preserve their corn and meal in such vessels; without which precaution the insects would destroy them. Travellers in Asiatic countries abound with observations of this kind.

The word cruse, תפצ tsappachath, says Jarchi, signifies what in our tongue is expressed by bouteille, a bottle. Jarchi was a French rabbin.

1KINGS 17: 13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go and do as you have said; but make me of it a little cake first, and bring it out to me, and afterward make some for you and for your son."

Verse 13

But make me thereof a little cake first - This was certainly putting the widow's faith to an extraordinary trial: to take and give to a stranger, of whom she knew nothing, the small pittance requisite to keep her child from perishing, was too much to be expected.

1KINGS 17: 14 For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'The jar of meal shall not empty, neither shall the jar of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.'

1KINGS 17: 15 She went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, ate many days.

1KINGS 17: 16 The jar of meal didn't empty, neither did the jar of oil fail, according to the LORD's word, which he spoke by Elijah.

Verse 16

The barrel of meal wasted not - She continued to take out of her jar and out of her bottle the quantity of meal and oil requisite for the consumption of her household; and without carefully estimating what was left, she went with confidence each time for a supply, and was never disappointed. This miracle was very like that wrought by Jesus at the marriage at Cana in Galilee: as the servants drew the water out of the pots, they found it turned into wine; and thus they continued to draw wine from the water-pots till the guests had been sufficiently supplied.

1KINGS 17: 17 After these things, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so severe, that there was no breath left in him.

Verse 17

There was no breath left in him - He ceased to breathe and died.

1KINGS 17: 18 She said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, you man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to memory, and to kill my son!"

Verse 18

To call my sin to remembrance - She seems to be now conscious of some secret sin, which she had either forgotten, or too carelessly passed over; and to punish this she supposes the life of her son was taken away. It is mostly in times of adversity that we duly consider our moral state; outward afflictions often bring deep searchings of heart.

1KINGS 17: 19 He said to her, "Give me your son." He took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into the room where he stayed, and laid him on his own bed.

1KINGS 17: 20 He cried to the LORD, and said, "LORD my God, have you also brought evil on the widow with whom I stay, by killing her son?"

1KINGS 17: 21 He stretched himself on the child three times, and cried to the LORD, and said, "LORD my God, please let this child's soul come into him again."

Verse 21

Stretched himself upon the child three times - It is supposed that he did this in order to communicate some natural warmth to the body of the child, in order to dispose it to receive the departed spirit. Elisha, his disciple, did the same in order to restore the dead child of the Shunammite, 2Kgs 4:34. And St. Paul appears to have stretched himself on Eutychus in order to restore him to life, Act 20:10.

Let this child's soul come into him again - Surely this means no more than the breath. Though the word נפש nephesh may sometimes signify the life, yet does not this imply that the spirit must take possession of the body in order to produce and maintain the flame of animal life? The expressions here are singular: Let his soul, נפש nephesh, come into him, על קרבו al kirbo, into the midst of him.

1KINGS 17: 22 The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Verse 22

And the soul - נפש nephesh, of the child came into him again, על קרבו al kirbo, into the midst of him; and he revived, ויח vaiyechi, and he became alive. Did he not become alive from the circumstance of the immaterial principle coming again into him?

Although רוח ruach is sometimes put for the breath, yet נפש generally means the immortal spirit, and where it seems to refer to animal life alone, it is only such a life as is the immediate and necessary effect of the presence of the immortal spirit.

The words and mode of expression here appear to me a strong proof, not only of the existence of an immortal and immaterial spirit in man, but also that that spirit can and does exist in a separate state from the body. It is here represented as being in the midst of the child, like a spring in the center of a machine, which gives motion to every part, and without which the whole would stand still.

1KINGS 17: 23 Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the room into the house, and delivered him to his mother; and Elijah said, "Behold, your son lives."

1KINGS 17: 24 The woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the LORD's word in your mouth is truth."

Verse 24

The word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth - Three grand effects were produced by this temporary affliction:

1. The woman was led to examine her heart, and try her ways;
2. The power of God became highly manifest in the resurrection of the child;
3. She was convinced that the word of the Lord was truth, and that not one syllable of it could fall to the ground. Through a little suffering all this good was obtained.

The subject in the fourth verse of this chapter deserves a more particular consideration.

I have commanded the ravens to feed thee. - It is contended that if we consider ערבים orebim to signify ravens, we shall find any interpretation on this ground to be clogged with difficulties. I need mention but a few. The raven is an unclean bird, And these ye shall have in abomination among the fowls - every raven after his kind; Lev 11:13-15; that is, every species of this genus shall be considered by you unclean and abominable. Is it therefore likely that God would employ this most unclean bird to feed his prophet? Besides, where could the ravens get any flesh that was not unclean? Carrion is their food; and would God send any thing of this kind to his prophet? Again: If the flesh was clean which God sent, where could ravens get it? Here must be at least three miracles: one to bring from some table the flesh to the ravens; another, to induce the ravenous bird to give it up; and the third, to conquer its timidity towards man, so that it could come to the prophet without fear. Now, although God might employ a fowl that would naturally strive to prey on the flesh, and oblige it, contrary to its nature, to give it up; yet it is by no means likely that he would employ a bird that his own law had pronounced abominable. Again, he could not have employed this means without working a variety of miracles at the same time, in order to accomplish one simple end; and this is never God's method: his plan is ever to accomplish the greatest purposes by the simplest means.

The original word orebim has been considered by some as meaning merchants, persons occasionally trading through that country, whom God directed, by inspiration, to supply the prophet with food. To get a constant supply from such hands in an extraordinary way was miracle enough; it showed the superintendence of God, and that the hearts of all men are in his hands.

But in answer to this it is said, that the "original word never signifies merchants; and that the learned Bochart has proved this." I have carefully read over cap. 13, part. ii., lib. 2, of the Hierozoicon of this author, where he discusses this subject; and think that he has never succeeded less than in his attempt to prove that ravens are meant in this passage. He allows that the Tyrian merchants are described by this periphrasis, ערבי מערבך, the occupiers of thy merchandise, Eze 27:27; and asserts that ערבים orebim, per se, mercatores nusquam significat, "by itself, never signifies merchants." Now, with perfect deference to so great an authority, I assert that ערבי oreby, the contracted form of ערבים orebim, does signify merchants, both in Eze 27:9 and Eze 27:27, and that מערב maarab signifies a place for merchandise, the market-place or bazaar, in Eze 27:9, Eze 27:13, Eze 27:17, Eze 27:19; as also the goods sold in such places, Eze 27:33; and therefore that ערבים orebim for aught proved to the contrary, signify merchants in the text.

As to Bochart's objection, that, the prophet being ordered to go to the brook Cherith, that he might lie hid, and the place of his retreat not be known, if any traders or merchants supplied his wants, they would most likely discover where he was, etc., I think there is no weight in it; for the men might be as well bound by the secret inspiration of God not to discover the place of his retreat, as they were to supply his wants; besides, they might have been of the number of those seven thousand men who had not bowed their knees to the image of Baal, and consequently would not inform Ahab and Jezebel of their prophet's hiding place.

Some have supposed that the original means Arabians; but Bochart contends that there were no Arabians in that district: this is certainly more than he or any other man can prove. Colonies of Arabs, and hordes and families of the same people, have been widely scattered over different places for the purpose of temporal sojournment and trade; for they were a wandering people, and often to be found in different districts remote enough from the place of their birth. But, letting this pass merely for what it is worth, and feeling as I do the weight of the objections that may be brought

against the supposition of ravens being the agents employed to feed the prophet, I would observe that there was a town or city of the name of Orbo, that was not far from the place where Elijah was commanded to hide himself. In Bereshith Rabba, a rabbinical comment on Genesis, we have these words עיר היא בתחום ביתשאן ושמה ערבו ir hi bithchom Beithshean, veshemo Orbo; "There is a town in the vicinity of Beth-shan, (Scythopolis), and its name is Orbo." We may add to this from St. Jerome, Orbim, accolae villae in finibus Arabum, Eliae dederunt alimenta; "The Orbim, inhabitants of a town in the confines of the Arabs, gave nourishment to Elijah." Now, I consider Jerome's testimony to be of great worth, because he spent several years in the holy land, that he might acquire the most correct notion possible of the language and geography of the country, as well as of the customs and habits of the people, in order to his translating the sacred writings, and explaining them. Had there not been such a place in his time, he could not have written as above: and although in this place the common printed editions of the Vulgate have corvi, "crows or ravens;" yet in 2Chr 21:16, St. Jerome translates the same word ערבים, "the Arabians;" and the same in Neh 4:7; it is therefore most likely that the inhabitants of Oreb or Orbo, as mentioned above, furnished the aliment by which the prophet was sustained; and that they did this being specially moved thereto by the Spirit of the Lord. Add to all these testimonies that of the Arabic version, which considers the words as meaning a people, Orabim, and not ravens or fowls of any kind. In such a case this version is high authority.

It is contended that those who think the miracle is lost if the ravens be not admitted, are bound to show,

1. With what propriety the raven, an unclean animal, could be employed?
2. Why the dove, or some such clean creature, was not preferred?
3. How the ravens could get properly dressed flesh to bring to the prophet?
4. From whose table it was taken; and by what means?
5. Whether it be consistent with the wisdom of God, and his general conduct, to work a tissue of miracles where one was sufficient?
6. And whether it be not best, in all cases of this kind, to adopt that mode of interpretation which is most simple; the wisdom, goodness, and providence of God being as equally apparent as in those cases where a multitude of miracles are resorted to in order to solve difficulties?