

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION TO 1 KINGS 17

This chapter begins with a prophecy of Elijah, that there should be want of rain for some years to come, and he is directed to go first to the brook Cherith, where he should be fed by ravens, (^{<1170>}1 Kings 17:1-7), and afterwards he is sent to a widow at Zarephath, where he, she, and her son, were supported for a considerable time with a handful of meal, and a little oil in a cruse miraculously increased, (^{<1178>}1 Kings 17:8-16), whose son falling sick and dying, he restored to life, (^{<1177>}1 Kings 17:17-24).

Ver. 1. *And Elijah the Tishbite, [who] was of the inhabitants of Gilead,* etc.] Which belonged partly to the Reubenites and Gadites, and partly to the half-tribe of Manasseh on the other side Jordan, where this prophet dwelt; but why he is called the Tishbite is not easy to say; what Kimchi observes seems right, that he was at first of a city called Toshab, and afterward's dwelt at Gilead; which city perhaps is the same with Thisbe, in the tribe of Naphtali, the native place of Tobit,

“Who in the time of Enemessar king of the Assyrians was led captive out of Thisbe, which is at the right hand of that city, which is called properly Nephthali in Galilee above Aser.” (Tobit 1:2)

and, if so, is an instance of a prophet, even the prince of prophets, as Abarbinel calls him, coming out of Galilee, contrary to the suggestions of the Jews, (^{<407>}John 7:52). R. Elias Levita ^{f359} observes, that after the affair of Gibeah an order was given to smite the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead, (^{<1218>}Judges 21:8-15), and that as it is reasonable to suppose some might escape, he thinks Elijah was one of them; and that when this began to be inhabited again, they that returned were called the inhabitants of Gilead, of whom Elijah was, who lived in those times, being, as the Jews suppose, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron, (see ^{<1218>}Judges 20:28), but that he should be Elijah, and live to the times of Ahab, is beyond belief. By Origen ^{f360} he is said to be in Thesbon of Gilead; and by Epiphanius ^{f361} to be of Thesbis, of the land of the Arabians, Gilead bordering upon it: the same

said unto Ahab; who perhaps had been with him before, and reproved him for idolatry, warned him of the evil consequences of it, but to no purpose, and therefore now threatened in a very solemn manner:

as the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand; he swears by the living God, in whose presence he was, and to whom he appeals as the omniscient God, whose minister and prophet he was, and in whose name he came and spoke, and to whom he prayed; for standing was a prayer gesture, and sometimes put for it, (see Gill on “⁴⁰⁶⁵Matthew 6:5”) and it was at the prayer of Elijah that rain was withheld, as follows, (see ⁴⁰⁶⁷James 5:17)

there shall not be dew nor rain these years; for some years to come, even three years and a half:

but according to my word; in prayer, or as he should predict, in the name of the Lord.

Ver. 2. *And the word of the Lord came to him*, etc.] The word of prophecy, as the Targum; this shows that by word, in the former verse, he means the word of the Lord by him:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 3. *Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward*, etc.] From the place where he was, being in danger from Ahab and Jezebel, provoked by his reproofs, threatenings, and prophecies:

and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan; in some wood or cave near it, or among the reeds and rushes that grew on the banks of it; and Bochart ^{f362} takes it to be the same with the river Kanah, on the borders of Ephraim, which has its name from reeds, (⁴⁰⁶⁸Joshua 16:8 17:9), and Cherith by anticipation, from the prophet’s being fed there; and Adrichomius ^{f363} places this brook in the tribe of Ephraim; though Fuller ^{f364} in the half tribe of Manasseh, beyond Jordan; but Bunting says ^{f365} it runs from Mount Ephraim between Bethel and Jericho, eight miles from Jerusalem towards the north, and so, passing along towards the east, falls into Jordan.

Ver. 4. *And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook*, etc.] The water of that was to be his drink:

and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there; whereby he should be provided with food to eat; by whom are meant not angels in the form of ravens, as some; nor, as others, Arabians, for there were none of that people near him; nor, as others, merchants, the word being sometimes used of them, for this was not a likely method for privacy; nor, as others, the inhabitants of a place called Oreb, or Orbo; so the Arabic version calls them Orabimi; but we read of no such place near Jordan; the Jews ^{f366} speak of a city of this name near Bethshean, from whence these Orebim came; and some of them ^{f367} think they had their name from Oreb, in (~~Q1725~~Judges 7:25) it seems better to interpret them of ravens, as we do, these creatures delighting to be in solitary places, in valleys, and by brooks; nor need it be any objection that they were unclean creatures by the law, since Elijah did not feed upon them, but was fed by them; and supposing any uncleanness by touch, the ceremonial law might be dispensed with in an extraordinary case, as it sometimes was; though it is very remarkable that such creatures should be employed in this way, which are birds of prey, seize on anything they can, live on carrion, and neglect their own young, and yet feed a prophet of the Lord; which shows the power and providence of God in it. Something like this Jerom ^{f368} relates, of a raven bringing a whole loaf of bread, and laying it before the saints, Paulus and Antonius.

Ver. 5. *So he went, and did according to the word of the Lord*, etc.] Took his journey eastward, and hid himself in the place directed to:

for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan, (see Gill on ~~Q1725~~1 Kings 17:3”).

Ver. 6. *And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening*, etc.] For his breakfast and supper, the two principal meals then in use; and as there were several employed, they could bring a sufficiency in a short time for each meal; and these provisions were ready prepared, the bread made and baked, and the flesh boiled, broiled, or roasted; from whence they had it need not be inquired after; the Jews say ^{f369} they were fetched from Ahab’s table, and others from Jehoshaphat’s, and others, as probable as any, from the tables of the 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal:

and he drank of the brook; at his meals.

Ver. 7. *And it came to pass after a while*, etc.] Or “at the end of days” ^{f370}, perhaps a year, which sometimes is the sense of this phrase, (see ^{<0230>}Exodus 13:10 ^{<0770>}Judges 17:10),

that the brook dried up; through the excessive heat, and for want of supplies from the springs and fountains with which it was fed, and for the following reason:

because there had been no rain in the land; from the time Elijah prayed and prophesied; of this drought mention is made in profane history: Menander, a Phoenician writer, speaks ^{f371} of a drought in the times of Ithobalus (the same with Ethbaal the father of Jezebel), which lasted a whole year, and upon prayer being made there were thunder, etc.

Ver. 8. *And the word of the Lord came unto him*, etc.] As before, after he had been a year at the brook, and that was dried up:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 9. *Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there*, etc.] This might be a trial of the prophet’s faith, to be sent to dwell in a place belonging to the Zidonians, among whom Jezebel had an interest, being the daughter of their king, (^{<1165>}1 Kings 16:31), the place is so called, to distinguish it from another Zarephath, (Obidiah 1:20), Kimchi interprets it, near to Zidon, yet not as belonging to it, but of the land of Israel; though it rather seems to be a Gentile city; it is called, in (^{<0005>}Luke 4:26) Sarepta of Sidon; and also by Pliny ^{f372}; according to Josephus ^{f373}, it was not far either from Sidon or Tyre, and lay between them; it was three quarters of a mile from Sidon; and so Mr. Maundrell ^{f374} speaks of it as in the way from Sidon to Tyre, and which is now called Sarphan; of which he says, the place shown us for this city consisted only of a few houses, on the tops of the mountains, within about half a mile from the sea; but it is more probable the principal part of the city stood below in the space between the hills and the sea, there being ruins still to be seen in that place of a considerable extent; and a traveller into those parts many years before him says ^{f375}, that he saw nothing of any building on the shore, but some small houses in the place where formerly the town of Sarepta did stand; and Bunting says ^{f376}, there are at this time but eight houses in all the town, though by the ruins it seems to have been in times past a very fair city; and another ^{f377} observes, that it is about three miles from Berytus:

behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee; not that this was declared to the woman, or that she had any orders from the Lord to support him; but that he had determined it in his mind, and would take care in his providence that he should be supplied by her: this was another trial of the prophet's faith, that he should be sent to a poor widow woman for his support, and she a Gentile; but he that had been so long fed by ravens, could have no reason to doubt of his being provided for in this way.

Ver. 10. *So he arose, and went to Zarephath*, etc.] Which, according to Bunting^{f378}, was one hundred miles from the brook Cherith:

and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering sticks: perhaps out of an hedge just without the city this shows her to be a poor woman, who had no other way of coming at fuel but this, and no servant to fetch it for her: Bunting tells us, that now before the gate of the city there is showed a certain chapel, where they say Elias first spoke with the widow:

and he called to her, and said, fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink; being thirsty through travelling, and supposing this to be the woman he was directed to, made trial of her this way; some render it, "in this vessel"^{f379}, which he had with him, and made use of at the brook Cherith.

Ver. 11. *And as she was going to fetch it*, etc.] For she made no difficulty of granting his request, but immediately set out to fetch him some water from the city, or some spring close by, or her own house; being very ready to do an hospitable act to a stranger, and especially to a good man, and a prophet, as she might perceive by his habit he was, as it seems by what follows:

and said, bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand; to eat before he drank; this he said still further to try her whether she was the person that was to sustain him, as well as in order to lead on to more discourse with her.

Ver. 12. *And she said, as the Lord thy God liveth*, etc.] Which shows her to be a good woman, swearing by the living God, and him only, and that she took Elijah to be a good man, and a prophet of the Lord:

I have not a cake; greater or less, not a morsel of bread in the house:

but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; these separate and unmixed, and not made into a cake, and dressed as she intended to do with them:

and, behold, I am gathering two sticks; or a few, which would be sufficient to bake such a quantity as her meal and oil would make; she speaks by the figure “meiosis”, which expresses less than what is meant, as Ben Melech observes:

that I may go in and dress it for me, and my son, that we may eat it, and die; having nothing more left, and no expectation of any elsewhere, and the famine strong in the land; so that she could look for nothing but death after this was eaten.

Ver. 13. *And Elijah said unto her, fear not*, etc.] That she and her son should die, it would not be the case:

go and do as thou hast said: mix her meal and her oil, and make a cake thereof, and bake it:

but make thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son: which was not said from a selfish spirit of the prophet, but to try the faith of the woman; and besides, as Abarbinel observes, the prophet was not only hungry and thirsty through his journey, and so required to be served first, but it was for the sake of his sustenance, that the Lord would command a blessing on the meal and oil; wherefore, if she dressed it for herself and her son first, there would have been none left for the divine blessing to descend upon.

Ver. 14. *For thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, etc.] Whom the prophet perceived she had knowledge of, and faith in:

the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail; that is, the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruse, by an hypallage, or change of words:

until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth; which was assuring her the rain would be sent, and that the Lord, who had the sole command of it, would send it; and that, until that time it should be sent, she would have no lack of provisions, and therefore need not scruple dressing for the prophet first.

Ver. 15. *And she went, and did according to the saying of Elijah, etc.*]. Made a cake for him first, and brought it to him, which showed great faith in the word of the Lord by him:

and she, and he, and her house, did eat; many days, a year at least, if not two years, (see ^{<1170>}1 Kings 17:7) the widow, the prophet, and her family, lived upon the meal and oil so long; we read but of one son, but she might have more.

Ver. 16. *And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.*] There being a continual increase and supply of both, through the mighty power of God working a continued miracle; just as the loaves and fishes were increased while the disciples were eating, (^{<1449>}Matthew 14:19,20).

Ver. 17. *And it came to pass after these things,* etc.] Not only after the conversation that passed between the prophet, and the widow, but after they had lived together many days, a year or years, upon the miraculous provision made for them:

that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; that is, the son of the widow woman in whose house the prophet dwelt; the Jews say ^{f380} this woman was the mother of Jonah, and that he was this son of her's:

and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him: it was a sickness unto death, it issued in it; for that he was really dead appears from all that follows.

Ver. 18. *And she said unto Elijah, what have I to do with thee, O thou man of God!* etc.] As if she should say, it would have been well for me if I had never seen thy face, or had any conversation with thee; this she said rashly, and in her passion and agony, being extremely affected with the death of her child, which made her forget and overlook all the benefits she had received through the prophet's being with her:

art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? to punish her for her former sins, she was conscious she had been guilty of; for she supposed, that as it was by his prayer that the drought and famine were come upon the land, so it was in the same way that her son's death came, namely, through the prayer of the prophet.

Ver. 19. *And he said unto her, give me thy son, and he took him out of her bosom*, etc.] Where she had laid him, mourning over him; from thence the prophet took him with her leave:

and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed; an upper room, which was his bedchamber; hither he carried him, that he might be alone, and use the greater freedom both in his expressions and gestures.

Ver. 20. *And he cried unto the Lord*, etc.] Or prayed unto him, as the Targum, with great vehemence and importunity:

and said, O Lord, my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? he pleads his interest in the Lord, and makes use of it as an argument with him to hear his prayer; he observes the character and condition of the woman, a widow, such as the Lord has a compassionate regard for; and he urges the kindness of her to him, with whom he had sojourned so long; and seems to represent the case as an additional evil or affliction to him, as well as to the widow.

Ver. 21. *And he stretched himself upon the child three times*, etc.] Or “measured himself”^{f381} on it, or put himself into a posture in some respects equal to the child; putting his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, his hands on its hands, as Elisha afterwards did in a like case, perhaps in imitation of him, (² Kings 4:34), thereby showing his great affection to the child, and in order to increase it the more, and to make him the more fervent and importunate in his prayers for its life; and hereby signifying also that he would if he could infuse his breath and life into it, and warm it with his own heat:

and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again: which shows that the child was really dead; and a proof this that the soul dies not with the body, but exists in a separate state without it.

Ver. 22. *And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah*, etc.] In prayer, and answered it:

and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived; this is the first instance of anyone being raised from the dead; this Satan has imitated; hence the many fabulous stories with the Heathens of persons being raised to life after death^{f382}.

Ver. 23. *And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house,* etc.] Being come to life, he took it off of the bed in his bedchamber, and brought it down to the lower part of the house, where the woman was:

and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, see, thy son liveth; which no doubt was to her great surprise, and was a wonderful instance of divine power and goodness, and to which the apostle may have respect, (~~8115~~ Hebrews 11:35), Bunting ^{f383} says, the inhabitants of this place now take upon them to show the chamber wherein the prophet Elias lived, when he raised the widow's child to life.

Ver. 24. *And the woman said to Elijah, now by this I know that thou art a man of God,* etc.] She took him to be one at his first coming to her; she was in a great measure confirmed in it by the miracle of the barrel of meal and cruse of oil; but upon the death of her son, which she was ready to impute to the prophet, she was staggered at it; but now, by his resurrection from the dead, was fully assured of it:

and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth; she had known before that what he said concerning the meal and oil not failing was true; but now she was more and more convinced and assured that the God, whose prophet he was, was the true God, and that the religion he professed was the true religion, and he a true prophet, and that all his prophecies would be exactly fulfilled.