

**Elijah**

**Part 1**

**Drought**

1 Kings 17

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### **Drought**

June 8 2008

**Sometimes, people of unknown background appear in the scriptures and do things which are quite surprising. The Bible is good at showing that God can use all kinds of persons to accomplish His will in any age and generation and Elijah was one such person.**

#### **Background**

**We pick up the account of Elijah in the book of 1 Kings Chapter 17. Before Elijah's time the nation of Israel had been chosen by Jehovah as His people but the nation had elected to have a king like other nations leading eventually to the division of the nation into two kingdoms (Israel to the north and Judah [Judah and Benjamin - 1 Kings 12:21 and some of Levi - Ezekiel 44:15] to the south). The kings of Judah reigned from Jerusalem and, eventually, the kings of Israel reigned from Samaria. Both were cities on hills.**

**Israel in particular was not well blessed with good kings. Jeroboam the first king of the new northern kingdom didn't want his people going south to Jerusalem in Judah to worship God and sacrifice in case they turned against him once they arrived. Therefore Jeroboam made two golden calves and put them different locations saying that *they* were the gods who brought them out of Egypt. In that way, the *second* commandment was broken in that Israel was not to worship images. However when we get to the time of Elijah things were much worse. Kings had come and gone and now a king called Ahab ruled Israel with his wife Jezebel.**

Jezebel was the daughter of a king of Sidon to the North of Israel. In her home country it's believed her name meant "Primrose". In Hebrew, though, it meant "Unchaste" or "Rubbish". Jezebel was religious but was dedicated to the worship of the Sidonian gods Baal and Asherah. Baal was the Sun-god (the male god of fertility and representing the producing principle in Nature) and Asherah the Moon-goddess (the female god of fertility representing the receptive principle in Nature and depicted in the form of a totem pole or upright tree trunk). Different areas had their own Baals.

Making calves representing God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt was bad enough but, under Ahab and Jezebel:-

- (i) God's priests were being slaughtered and many were in hiding,
- (ii) In their place 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah ate at Jezebel's table and
- (iii) Worship of the demonic gods Baal and Ahshera was being made the national religion thereby breaking the *first* commandment "You will have no other gods before Me".

Worship of Baal and Asherah involved witchcraft, male and female prostitution, obscene orgies involving crowds of devotees, and other sexual excesses. The actions of Ahab and Jezebel foisting that on God's people angered God more than all actions of the kings of Israel before him.

### The Appearance of Elijah

In this situation, Elijah just seems to “appear” on the scene. We have just snippets about his background. He came from Gilead which was known for its Bedouin type inhabitants who were a bit rough and ready. That could account for Elijah’s simple outer clothing consisting of a hair coat with a leather belt and might also account for his rather robust approach when addressing individuals. We’ll come across that again during this series. His name means God is Jehovah and, from what we read about him, he certainly set out to show the truth of his name.

James the brother of Jesus obviously had access to information about Elijah which we don’t have when he said in verses 17 and 18 of his epistle:

Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. James 5:17  
NIV

It is some comfort to read that James said that Elijah was a “man”. If by any chance he had said Elijah was a “woman” it would have given rise to much difficulty in trying to reconcile that with the Old Testament record!

Having said that, women have played key roles in God’s work. For example:-

**Hannah** Who gave her son Samuel to the Lord and he played a major part in Israel’s history.

**Rahab** Who at the risk of her life hid the spies who crossed Jordan to spy out the promised land.

**Ruth** Who as an example of believers dedicated to the Lord Jesus said to her mother in law Ruth 1:16-17 Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." NIV

**Mary** Who risked rejection and her reputation to become the mother of Jesus.

Then there were the women who stood at the cross with Jesus when the disciples fled

**Dorcas** Who was full of good works and whom God raised to life.

**Lydia** Whose heart the Lord opened to receive the words of Paul in Philippi

**Philips** four daughters who prophesied.

And many more. In scripture there are great women and great men alike.

### A Person Just Like Us

It is also some challenge to read that Elijah was a person just like us. That means you and I can expect God to use us in ways which might be quite surprising and we shouldn't think that the Lord would never do that "with little me" because we feel we are of no great significance or particularly if we feel we have failings. Elijah had his failings. Sometimes got his facts wrong (he

believed he was the only prophet left in Israel whereas some were hidden in caves and being looked after) and sometimes he was judgmental and seemed to lack compassion (When soldiers were sent to him and he called fire down on them). Those failings didn't stop the Lord from using him to great effect but they are sides of Elijah's character we should try to avoid. On the other hand, Elijah was prayerful, available, obedient and had faith in God and they are sides of his character we would do well to adopt.

So let's look at some of what Elijah did, what we can draw from that and how it might help and challenge us as Christians in our generations.

### Prevailing Prayer

One of the other things that James stresses about Elijah is that he prayed.

Now when James said that Elijah prayed we need to look at what that would mean to James. I'll explain. For example, if I meet Mr Brown who tells me he has been doing a spot of gardening, I know Mr Brown means that he's manicured his lawn which now looks stripy, and he's treated his flower beds with great care so when he's finished the garden looks like some well kept miniature park. However, if I go on to meet Mr Green who also tells me he has been doing a spot of gardening, I know Mr Green has cut down his 6 inch long grass with a hover mower which has scattered the cuttings everywhere and has used a strimmer to cut off the dandelions growing in his trodden down flower beds. A "spot of gardening" doesn't mean the same to one as it does to the other and I think it's like that with James over the word "prayed".

The church fathers reported that James had knees which were calloused like the knees of a camel. The reason for that was James spent a lot of time in prayer on his knees and James speaks of prayer on three separate occasions in his book. (James 1:5-7, 4:2-3, 5:14-16). So when James said that Elijah prayed, I think James had that sort of prayer in mind. The kind he understood was effective. That isn't to say we can't pray in the checkout queue – we can pray anywhere – but James is stressing the importance of the kind of prayer he was used to and how effective that can be. In James' view, Elijah was a good example of that.

However James didn't simply say that Elijah prayed but that he prayed earnestly. Literally, that means “In prayer he prayed” and is intended to intensify the force of the praying. For us, a better way of putting it is “he prayed constantly” or “he prayed again and again”. He just kept doing it and doing it. The position James adopted for prayer on his knees may well have been based on the position Elijah adopted on Mount Carmel just before the drought ended.

**1 Kings 18:42**

**42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel , bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.**

**NIV**

### **Elijah Consumed with the Condition of His Country**

I believe that Elijah's appearance on the scene didn't arise from a simple whim like “It's a nice day; I think I'll have a word with Ahab”. I believe

**Elijah was consumed with what he saw was happening to his country and his people. It would have grown from small beginnings.**

**Walking around and hearing people talk he would begin to feel deeply about the dreadful goings on with all this Baal worship.**

**1 “Oh God, I’m concerned over my country, something needs to be done”**

**2 “Lord, things are such a mess, it’s just getting worse”. Lord, you need to do something.**

**3 “Lord, my country – Your country – Lord the false gods, the lurid worship. Lord please do something. Use me even. What can I do Lord?”**

**4 “Lord unless you do something – there’s no hope – do something Lord – anything.....”**

**And this would not just be something on his mind at a quick morning prayer time but the state of things and the need to lift it to God would keep coming back to him time and time again and absorb him during the day and when he woke at night until the full horror of what was happening in Israel simply consumed him until almost nothing else mattered any more. It comes out in the life of Christ when the zeal of God’s house consumed Him to the point of overturning the tables of money changers in the temple because it had become a market place. That kind of feeling gives rise to what James calls praying “earnestly”.**

Perhaps Elijah was able search the scriptures or maybe he just knew off by heart what God had warned in the Law of Moses in the event that Israel turned away from Him:-

**Lev 26:14-20 (Some verses omitted in the passage below)**

But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you..... I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass : And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. KJV

James writes:-

.....he prayed *earnestly* that it would not rain..... James 5:17

Elijah saw that with God bringing such a curse on the land and making the sky and land as dry as iron and brass there was the possibility that Israel would turn back to God and he prayed and prayed and prayed that God would do it and the story of Elijah shows how God responds when people pray like that.

### Prayer Makes a Vital Difference

There is a feeling around that where a person says “There’s not much for me to do. All I can do is pray” they are saying that they are not making much of a contribution. In fact repeated prayer, bringing the same thing before the

**Lord again and again until there is breakthrough is not just making a contribution, it's doing precisely what the Lord Jesus said we should do.**

**Luke 18:1-2**

**Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. NIV**

**It isn't lack of faith to keep praying for the same thing until you get a breakthrough – in fact it can be surprisingly difficult sometimes to keep up that kind of praying but Elijah did and we can learn from his example.**

**Finally, the day came when Elijah knew the time was right to confront Ahab. At some point he just knew. That fact is that Elijah during his time spent with God in earnest prayer about sending drought began to hear the word of the Lord. I don't know how it came to him at the beginning – maybe it just came into his mind during his hours of prayer and he began to recognize it as God speaking. At other times later on Angels appeared to him and spoke God's word. Maybe he even had angelic encounters early on too. We just don't know. What we can say is this, when a person spends much time in God's presence praying earnestly with heart and soul for an issue which is also dear to God's heart, it gives God the opportunity to speak whether that be with a voice heard in the mind, an audible voice or through angelic encounters and any of that is possible for those who are prepared to pray earnestly.**

**Well that day came when Elijah got breakthrough and was confident that once he spoke the word to Ahab, that would be the beginning of drought until further notice. I don't know how he got an audience with Ahab but he**

**dropped the news and disappeared, leaving Ahab to think about it. Actually, it probably didn't rain much anyway and it could well have been some time before Ahab began to think seriously about what Elijah had said and when he did think he wasn't happy. I don't know if Elijah spoke the truth in love but even if he did Ahab didn't receive it that way! In fact, as famine eventually began to take hold, Elijah became an enemy in Ahab's eyes.**

**After Elijah announced the news, God began to respond to the earnest prayer of a person who James says was like us. We should be encouraged by that. We should be encouraged by something else too and it's this. When people link up with the Lord in prayer like Elijah did, God honours such people and surprising things can happen. There are four such things in 1 Kings 17. We'll look at two of them now and two more next time. These are the four things that we see:-**

- 1 Climate being obedient to God**
- 2 Creatures being obedient to God**
- 3 An unbeliever being obedient to God and**
- 4 Cereals and oil being obedient to God**

**I want to touch on the first two in this message and I want us to be challenged and encouraged.**

## **1 Climate Being Obedient to God**

**In a land which was frequently dry and where water was a very precious commodity, God turned off the tap and the climate changed. It was nothing to do with carbon footprints, chariots with two horse power engines or Phoenician glass furnaces belching out pollutants. The cause of the climate change was spiritual. God says “No rain” and – it doesn’t rain. God’s word is final and this passage of scripture shows that God is prepared to respond to earnest prayer. We should be encouraged by that.**

**Apparently, it’s said these days that scientists are about 90 per cent certain that world climate change is caused by human activity. Now I don’t know enough about alleged climate change to speak with authority on it but I’m unaware of anyone in authority suggesting that climate change, at least in part, could be put down to spiritual causes and that it’s time to seek God for an answer. It would be a brave politician that did!**

**We know that the Lord showed his authority over wind and waves, that God caused climatic change in the days of Noah and that Pharaoh in Egypt felt the power of God’s control over weather in the time of Moses.**

**I’m not sticking my neck out and saying there’s no point in using low energy light bulbs or switching off electrical appliances when they’re not being used. However, I do wonder what would happen if there were a widespread turning to Christ and an honouring of Jehovah as God which is what Elijah wanted to see happening. Maybe there could be climate change for the good on an unprecedented scale. I’ll leave you to think about that.**

## **2 Creatures being obedient to God**

As soon as Elijah had sworn by the God of Israel that there would be no rain until Elijah said so, he heard God's voice and moved away from Samaria to live beside a brook called Cherith about forty miles to the east. God knew that the powers that be would search for Elijah and later we read that Ahab actually tried to search him out, even to the point of making neighbouring countries swearing to Ahab that Elijah was not with them. Ahab must have had considerable influence to enforce that and must have searched very diligently in an attempt to find Elijah who Ahab saw was to blame for the lack of rain.

God didn't just say to Elijah "Go and hide somewhere". God specifically located him.

### **1 Kings 17:3-4**

"Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." NIV

The Cherith brook ran into the river Jordan. Cherith hasn't been accurately located but it was almost certainly in Gilead which was where Elijah came from. It was familiar territory and it's interesting that God put him on home ground. The Lord told Elijah that he should drink from the brook and that the Lord had ordered ravens to feed him there. Note that God says He will feed Elijah there. In other words, Elijah just couldn't go where he liked at

that time. He had to be near the brook God promised to feed him there; not anywhere else. I doubt if Elijah would have starved wherever he went but God seemed to be working on a right place/right time principle here and that may apply to Christians too. (eg Philip and the Ethiopian )

### **Home Ground**

Elijah had embarked on something new and God was about to show that He honours those who serve Him. (see John 12:26.....any man serve me, him will my Father honour KJV). I know that you hear things said about God wanting to move us out of our comfort zones so as to put us somewhere which is more challenging. That was yet to happen to Elijah but, right now, Elijah was put on home ground and there's usually something good about being on home ground. It's the "no place like home" feeling and there's a time for that in our walk with God.

Those who are young in the faith need good ground to grow in and it's wise to have a home church in which to grow, to be taught and to mature. In my own experience, I came to Christ in 1961 and for me it was all new. I then spent about fourteen years in an AOG church. The AOG was my home church where I "drank from the brook" – was baptized with the Holy Spirit - and ate the food God provided by way of the teaching from people of God. Some of those teachers were highly respected in the AOG movement and it was invaluable to my growth as a Christian. I thank the Lord even now for what I learned then. After about fourteen years Jean and I moved to a CoE church and some years later to a free evangelical church learning more on the way. After nine years there we moved to Coundon and here we have learned still more and, we

hope, have also helped others to grow in the faith. However, the time spent at the home church in the early 1960's was of fundamental importance.

Actually, the home ground of Gilead was a pleasant place for Elijah to be. It was a mountainous forested region with good rainfall providing ideal grazing ground for goats which are referred to in Song of Solomon 6:5

Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead. NIV

Gilead was famous for exporting spices and balms and myrrh and it was merchants on their way from Gilead with such things who bought Joseph for silver as they went towards Egypt.

So, where Elijah went was by no means a barren land and with all the forestry it would have been an easy place in which to tuck himself away and hide from Ahab.

We'll leave Elijah there and look next time at how God looked after him at Cherith in quite an unusual Way.

