

## Elijah — Jehovah's Power Over Death

### 1 Kings 17:17-24 (KJV)

**17** And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. **18** And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? **19** And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. **20** And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? **21** And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. **22** And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. **23** And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. **24** And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.

### Obstacles

Somewhere in my young and inexperienced mind, I latched on to the idea that if I had the Holy Ghost that everything in my life would work out without any hindrances or obstacles. I can remember not studying and praying to the Lord for His help. I can remember a host of things that I prayed over and about and sometimes God worked it out for me, but there were other times that I prayed for things and it did not turn out the way I desired for it to and it was confusing!

It literally took me about twenty years to finally shake free from that very deceptive and inaccurate thought. I suppose the Lord started gently pulling it out from under me when my Pontiac Fiero got stolen my very first night in Houston when I went to Bible College.

Here is what experience but more importantly Scripture has taught me... The Christian life is a great hope that is mixed with a hard struggle. Blessings appear on the horizon, but the presence of blessings do not relieve me of certain troubles that come my way either.

One of the most challenging things to finally come to understand (but beneficial also) is that I had some very wrong expectations about God and His intervention in my life. Far too many have bought into the Christian life, because they had expectations that all would work out so very well and they would have God “on their side” to take care of every little hiccup that life brought to them.

This message in the life of Elijah homes in on this point; you have hope, but that hope will be rooted in struggle. There will be blessing, but there will also be buffeting.

## **2 Corinthians 1:3-11 (KJV)**

**3** Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; **4** Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. **5** For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. **6** And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. **7** And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. **8** For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: **9** But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: **10** Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; **11** Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

## **Elijah And His Battle with Death**

Consider for a moment that phrase in 1 Kings 17:17... And it came to pass after these things... There is so much in that, because it makes us look back at some of the mileage that Elijah’s back trails have covered.

Courage to confront Ahab

Calling a spiritual signal for drought throughout Israel

Removed from the public arena into a private sanctuary at Cherith  
From the cutting down at Cherith to the crucible in Zarephath  
Beginning the process of becoming a man of God

We find that becoming a man of God for Elijah was not some academic thing that was learned in a Bible college classroom or in the halls of a seminary, but in the middle of testing and trouble. God used all the difficulties and calamities to shape him into the prophet of fire.

What we can see is that Elijah's time at Zarephath was one of steady, enduring patience. Not complaint, or grumbling, or accusation, but just a calm faith that the Lord knew what He was doing. That is a hard lesson to learn sometimes when we may feel like we are spending our lives in places where it appears that nothing is happening.

### **Steady Provision and Sudden Loss**

#### **1 Kings 17:17-18 (KJV)**

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For a moment, it is important to rehearse where and what this widow had experienced. She is living in a land of idolatry that exalts Baal and it has been ravaged by famine and drought. Then the prophet shows up and she cooks for him of what little she had. Because of this Jehovah's steady provision assured her of blessing every morning.

It was enough! The meal wasted not nor did the oil fail... she received just enough to get her through. We often do not receive an overabundance of joy, grace, peace, patience, and other things, but we do receive enough to help us move forward through the furnace of affliction.

Those blessings came through the small things of her life. It was a small son that loved her who was probably oblivious to the pressures of the famine. It was a jug

of oil and a jar of meal and both were so common, so ordinary, and so normal, but all those things were literally contributing to the miraculous in her life.

So, it was that every morning she would go to the pantry shelf and experience the touch of God in His steady provision for there was just enough for a daily miracle.

### **Lamentations 3:22-26 (KJV)**

**22** It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. **23** They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. **24** The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. **25** The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. **26** It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.

There is an old hymn that we used to sing:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not,  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above;  
Join with all nature in manifold witness,  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own great presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

No doubt this little woman had the same feeling about her every morning.

Be careful that you do not let the common and ordinary blessings of life slip by you so that you forget to be grateful for them! So much that has been given to our lives by God and we forget to offer Him thanks for it. Because of our American consumer mindset, we must fight against that entitlement mentality that stifles our praise to God.

But in the midst the steady provision and sustaining miracles that came from that little jug and jar, trouble stormed into the widow's life. The kid got sick and he died. Apparently, there was very little warning, one day he is healthy and the next day he has passed on.

*"The tokens of life sat on her shelf while the fact of death was in her arms."*  
– Dale Ralph Davis

You find it here... 1 Kings 17:15-16 are the steady provisions of life and 1 Kings 17:17-18 the sudden loss of life.

There are times in life when we experience the greatness of God and still have to endure trouble. She is suddenly at the end of her rope, because she tells Elijah, what do I have to do with you? Why have you brought this calamity to my house? Have you shown up to bring all my past sins to light?

More than one person has had the whirl of this emotion to get a grip on them. Who has sinned that has caused this tragic thing to take place? Why has God allowed this terrible thing to take place? We aren't the first ones to contemplate that and if the Lord tarries we won't be the last ones to let that matter give rise in our lives.

Because I believe that Scripture is God-breathed and it has the ability bring instruction and enlightenment to our mind, we have to look to the Word and seek out the answer. This very matter of 'what caused this' was dealt with by Jesus:

### **John 9:1-7 (KJV)**

**1** And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. **2** And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he

was born blind? **3** Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. **4** I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. **5** As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. **6** When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, **7** And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents? There is a portion of their thought that rings true, because sin does cause problems. But there was a prominent and very popular Jewish doctrine at the time that believed that anyone who was suffering physically was doing so because of sin.

What we can be safe in concluding:

Suffering in general is ultimately a result of sin

Sometimes specific illnesses can be related to the direct consequence of sin (Miriam's leprosy, etc.)

Sometimes it can be related to violating holy things and holy places (1 Cor. 11:30, the Lord's Supper)

Sometimes children can be forced to endure the consequences of their parent's sinful lifestyles (fetal alcohol syndrome, drug addictions, and sexually transmitted diseases)

But we cannot forget the reply of the Lord to them... Neither that this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. There is not always a direct link between suffering and personal sin.

The misery of Job is a witness of that

The men who had the tower in Siloam to fall on them is a witness of that

Here is what is important to understand, all of humankind has to endure suffering. If there had never been sin, there would be no suffering. But when we try to link up a sin with a particular sense of suffering as the widow did, we can fall into three traps:

If things go bad for others, we can make it the judgment of God, but if things go bad for ourselves we make it an attack of the devil and overlook our own failings.

If someone has to endure suffering, we can think that God hates them and turn their faults into heinous crimes.

If things go bad for others, we sometimes forget that God uses affliction and discipline in a way that a parent uses it to correct a child. In fact, one of the marks of being a child of God is the hand of God's discipline in our lives.

**Psalm 119:67 (KJV)** Before I Was Afflicted I Went Astray: But Now Have I Kept Thy Word.

**Psalm 119:71 (KJV)** It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

**Psalm 119:75 (KJV)** I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

On the other hand, be ever so careful to try to pinpoint every little trouble you have in life on either God or the devil. We live in a fallen world and the calamities of this life ought to only serve as a motivation to do what is right in honoring God and making it to heaven.

In this life, you must come to grips with the fact that God often blesses and baffles His servants, but He always is working harder in my behalf to save me than I am trying to save myself from this untoward generation.

One other thing before go on... Sometimes the problems we have are just because we are human beings and it is called life.

### **Elijah's Prayer and Jehovah's Answer**

**1 Kings 17:19-22 (KJV)**

**19** And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

**20** And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought

evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? **21** And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. **22** And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Elijah is picking up on the distress of the widow's soul and he simply tells her to give him her son. He does not respond back to her accusations with a defense, he only feels the pain that she is enduring at the moment.

Do we respond like that?

Do we put ourselves in the position of other people and plead to God for their anguish?

Sometimes the tendency is for us to try at answering their accusations when what is needed is for us to find a place of prayer for them.

Elijah took him up to his loft... to his room... to his prophet's quarters. It was here that Elijah had regularly communed with God for a little while now. His place of prayer was a dwelling where he regularly communicated with God. He had been:

Molded

Shaped

Empowered

Anointed

Fitted

Strengthened

But as with all productive places of prayer, it had also been a place where:

He had wrestled with God and himself.

He had fought with God and himself.

He had wept before God.

He had gave himself to spiritual matters there... and God had spoken to him there.



Do you have a room like this somewhere in your life? If you don't, it is crucial that you do get one and if you do have a place like that, it is crucial that you continue to go there.

We all need a prophet's place of prayer...

### **Psalm 91:1-4 (KJV)**

**1** He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. **2** I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. **3** Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Elijah prayed for this young man in a way of desperation.

v. 20—He cried unto the Lord

v. 21—He cried unto the Lord

There wasn't any holy razzmatazz about Elijah's prayer. There wasn't a convenient escape to get him out of his jam. He was not a religious magician. He wasn't a super prophet... He was just a man whom God was trying to shape, crying out to the Lord.

Life had not only reduced the widow, but it had reduced Elijah to nothing and he began to plead in prayer.

### **James 5:13-14 (KJV)**

**13** Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

**14** Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

The text in James 5 pairs up with Elijah in v. 17 when it tells us that he was a man of like passions just as we are. That means that if there was pleading in his prayer, there will be pleading in our own praying.

Have you ever been reduced to such a helplessness in prayer? I would remind you that this is a great place to be in prayer. The death of this boy seemed to be a great blow to what the Lord had promised.

But the Lord always has the final say in every aspect of our lives. He will use trials to show Himself faithful in every area of our life.

### **Deuteronomy 8:1-3 (KJV)**

**1** All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers. **2** And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. **3** And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

The Lord is looking for the opportunity to bless to all His saints in the end.

### **Jehovah's Power over Death**

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This is the first instance of someone being raised from the dead in the Bible. Elijah was praying beyond himself in more than he realized. He did not have any past references at all of anyone being raised up from such a condition.

This story in the Bible goes far past just the general run of the mill trials of life and it tackles the greatest trial of all; death. When the widow's son died, it brought on a whole new challenge of Jehovah's authority. He could make the provisions for the table but could He overcome the grave?

*“It is one thing to rescue people from the jaws of death, but can he do anything when death has clamped tight its jaws and swallowed the victim up? He can act across the border from Israel in Sidon, but is there a ‘border’ that he ultimately cannot cross, a kingdom in which he has no power? When faced by ‘Mot,’ [Death, the god of the underworld in Canaanite mythology] must the Lord, like Baal, bow the knee?” – (1 and 2 Kings, New International Biblical Commentary, p. 134) Iain W. Provan*

The answer roars out of 1 Kings 17... Absolutely not! Jehovah will never bow a knee to death. He is not only the Lord over the dearth of a famine (vv. 1-16) but He is the Lord over death (vv. 17-24). That is the whole testimony of this text. It is one of those passages in the Old Testament that helps all of us to see over into the land beyond this life.

It points forward toward something that every child of God will one day experience. We ought to do everything we can to eagerly respond to the call to salvation. Not so we can just escape hell, but so that we can live a life that will be more full than anything else we have ever understood.

### **Won't It Be Wonderful There?**

The early Christians had a great preoccupation with Heaven. The Roman catacombs where the bodies of martyred Christians were buried had words etched out in the stones:

In Christ, Alexander is not dead, but lives.  
One who lives with God.  
He has taken up an eternal home.

They took to heart what the Lord had to say:

### **John 14:1-4 (KJV)**

**1** Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. **2** In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. **4** And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

Historians who study the history of Rome pointed out that the pictures and inscriptions on the walls of the catacombs portrayed Heaven with beautiful landscapes, children playing, and people feasting at banquets.

Aristides (A.D. 125) wrote to a friend of his about Christianity and gave some explanation as to why it had attracted such a following: If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.

Cyprian, one of the early church fathers: Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us from this place and sets us free from the snares of this world, and restores us to paradise and the kingdom. Anyone who has been in foreign lands longs to return to his own native land... We regard paradise as our native land.

Those early Christian perspectives sound so out of touch with our world today. The goal of most Christians is to have an easy life where they can have a small little piece of their own American dream. But here are some of the things that Paul wrote:

**Philippians 1:21 (KJV)** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

**Philippians 1:23 (KJV)** For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

**2 Corinthians 5:6 (KJV)** Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

**2 Corinthians 5:8 (KJV)** We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

What is the goal of all of this?

**Revelation 21:1-4 (KJV)**

**1** And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. **2** And I John saw the holy city,

new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. **4** And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Let me give you some unsettling news... God uses suffering and impending death to unfasten us from this earth and to set our minds on what lies beyond. Far too many people live their whole lives unprepared for death. But those who are wise will go to a reliable source to find out what is on the other side.

Ancient merchants often wrote the words memento mori—think of death—in large letters on the first page of their accounting books. We should have that same matter pressed into our own minds, because all of us are racing toward the grave.

But for those who have been redeemed... There is a great hope that is ahead of us. As the old song goes, “Won’t It Be Wonderful There?”