

1 Kings 17

The Northern Kingdom of Israel should be remembered for wicked kings. Ahab was one of the worst of them all. In addition, he married a Gentile wife, Jezebel from Phoenicia, who was more wicked than he, establishing Baal worship, killing the prophets, and hunting the life of Elijah.

...as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.

And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.

And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. (1 Kings 16:31-33)

George Q. Cannon

The kings who married strange women, women of those nations that God had forbidden Israel to marry, were never prospered; misfortune to themselves and the nation always followed these alliances. One of the most wicked kings that ever sat upon the throne of Israel married a woman of this description. Her name was Jezebel. She was a king's daughter too, a woman of noble birth, but one of the most wicked women that ever lived. To gratify her desire she incited her husband to murder, and to almost every other crime that could be committed. She was an idolatrous woman and she brought numberless miseries and condemnation from the Lord upon not only her husband's house, but upon the whole house of Israel because of her wickedness. (*Journal of Discourses*, 25:365)

1 Kings 17:1 there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word

A great famine came upon Israel because of the wickedness of Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. Elijah had power over the dew and the rain. Interestingly, this great famine affected him so that he had to rely entirely upon the Lord for his sustenance; he was not immune from the curse he pronounced. While we remember Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal as a great demonstration of the power of Jehovah, this famine was just as powerful and demonstrative that Jehovah, not Baal, rules in the heavens. "All Israel was put on notice that the drought to come would be caused by Jehovah, God of Israel, and not by

Baal, the supposed weather god.” (John A. Tvedtnes, “Elijah: Champion of Israel’s God,” *Ensign*, July 1990, 53)

“Together, Ahab and Jezebel worshipped the various Canaanite deities, including the god Ba’al and his consort Asherah. As the storm god, Ba’al was believed to control the weather and send the needed rain. Asherah was the cult’s fertility goddess. She was believed to make the earth fruitful and the harvest abundant when her followers performed erotic rituals that mocked everything that was sacred to Jehovah...

“Centuries before, the Lord had warned the Israelites that an abundant harvest depended on their love and service to Him and that He would stop the rain if they worshipped other gods (Deuteronomy 11:13-17). According to one Jewish Midrash, Jezebel and Ahab considered the drought as evidence that Elijah’s God was powerless to demand his people’s devotion. Elijah’s first illustration was therefore a perfect one to show that Ba’alim possessed no influence over the rainfall and harvest. Jehovah stopped the rainfall, which prevented a harvest and resulted in the widespread famine. Prayers to the storm god and rituals to the fertility goddess did not bring the needed water or abate the serious famine. Through a three-and-one-half-year drought, God showed that Baal does not control the weather or supply a bounteous harvest (Luke 4:25-26; James 5:17-18).” (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009], 222-225)

1 Kings 17:3 hide thyself by the brook Cherith

“Although God caused the drought, Elijah the prophet was not spared the suffering discomforts, and uncertainties of famine; neither were other followers of the Lord who lived under Ahab’s rule... The exact location of the brook Cherith is unknown but is thought to be one of the gorges that empties into the River Jordan... The area of the brook appears to have been within Israelite territory but outside King Ahab’s influence... The prophet was safe from Ahab and Jezebel as long as he remained near the brook Cherith, but prolonged hiding was not the Lord’s ultimate mission for Elijah. Therefore, the brook dried up and the Lord told a Phoenician woman to prepare for a visitor.” (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009], 222-225)

1 Kings 17:5 he went and did according unto the word of the Lord

Elijah “went and did” according to the word of the Lord. The widow also “went and did” according to the word of the prophet (v. 15). He “went and did;” she “went and did.” If all LDS men could follow Elijah’s example in following the Lord, if all LDS women could follow the widow’s example in following the Lord and his priesthood leaders, then the blessings Elijah’s priesthood would be available to all of them. Of this priesthood, the **Prophet Joseph** declared, “The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth; and to receive, obtain, and perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God, even unto the turning of the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children unto the fathers... the power of Elijah is sufficient to make our calling and election sure.” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 337-338)

Gordon B. Hinckley

I draw... strength from a statement made concerning the prophet Elijah, who warned King Ahab of drought and famine to come upon the land. But Ahab scoffed. And the Lord told Elijah to go and hide himself by the brook Cherith, that there he should drink of the brook, and that he would be fed by the ravens. The scripture records a simple and wonderful statement about Elijah: “So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord” (1 Kgs. 17:5).

There was no arguing. There was no excusing. There was no equivocating. Elijah simply “went and did according unto the word of the Lord.” And he was saved from the terrible calamities that befell those who scoffed and argued and questioned. (“If Ye Be Willing and Obedient,” *Ensign*, July 1995, 4)

1 Kings 17:6 ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening

Unlike the children of Israel, Elijah never complained about his “mannah.” Three years is a long time to eat the same thing. Perhaps the ravens were thoughtful and brought him different varieties of bread, and various seasoned meats so that he didn’t get bored with his diet. Still, would we be happy with two meals a day—no snacks, no chocolate, and nothing to drink but water?

Jeffrey R. Holland

Ravens did bring Elijah bread and meat to eat, but unless ravens carry more than I think they do, this was not a gourmet meal. (*Ensign*, May 1996, 29)

1 Kings 17:9-16 the widow of Zarephath

“The widow of Zarephath represents all of us who are poor in the eyes of the world. She was remembered by the Lord, however, as she was rich in spirit and in faith. Near death because of lack of food during a drought, she and her son lacked family support or other resources. Coupled with her profound poverty, she was a Phoenician, living in a community that belonged to the kingdom of Sidon, among a people who worshipped idols and rejected the God of Israel...

“Jesus Christ reminded the Jews in Nazareth of the remarkable faith of this Gentile woman in Zarephath (*Sarepta* in the New Testament Greek) who put love of God before all others, including her son. There were many widows who lived in Israel and who were suffering from the drought, Jesus told them, but God sent Elijah (*Elias* in the New Testament Greek) to a Gentile widow. (Luke 4:25-28)

“The people of Nazareth had just heard Jesus give a powerful spiritual witness of His divinity, but they were searching for reasons to discount and deny it. The Savior indicated to the Jews of His hometown that Gentiles recognized and responded to the witness of the Spirit more readily than they did.” (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009], 219-220)

1 Kings 17:12 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

The widow heart wrenching admission reveals her desperation. Who can make a fire with only two sticks? Were even sticks that scarce? Can we imagine how it feels to be this destitute? Can we imagine what it feels like to face our last meal, or worse, to know that our own child is starving, that it is time to face death together?

“The woman whom God called to assist Elijah represented every category of defenseless ones: she had lost her husband, her son was fatherless, and she was a Gentile, a stranger to the Israelites.

“The widows, the fatherless, and strangers were the vulnerable and unprotected in society. They were the ones without family connection, without anyone to champion their cause or care for their needs...

“Yet, the Lord sent the greatest to depend on the least. What a magnificent lesson in humility and added faith in the One who is ‘least in the kingdom of God’ and yet ‘greater’ than all others (Luke 7:28).

“As in all of God’s challenging circumstances, this lesson was not just to prepare and fortify Elijah. The Lord had something to teach the widow as well. Her encounters with the Israelite prophet would be changing, faith building, and empowering.” (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009], 226-227)

Thomas S. Monson

The widow’s home is generally not large or ornate. Frequently it is a modest one in size and humble in appearance. Often it is tucked away at the top of the stairs or the back of the hallway and consists of but one room. To such homes he sends you and me.

There may exist an actual need for food, clothing—even shelter. Such can be supplied. Almost always there remains the hope for that special hyacinth to feed the soul.

*Go, gladden the lonely, the dreary;
Go, comfort the weeping, the weary;
Go, scatter kind deeds on your way;
Oh, make the world brighter today!*

Let us remember that after the funeral flowers fade, the well wishes of friends become memories, and the prayers offered and words spoken dim in the corridors of the mind. Those who grieve frequently find themselves alone. Missed is the laughter of children, the commotion of teenagers, and the tender, loving concern of a departed companion. The clock ticks more loudly, time passes more slowly, and four walls do indeed a prison make.

Hopefully, all of us may again hear the echo of words spoken by the Master, inspiring us to good deeds: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ... ye have done it unto me.” (“The Fatherless and the Widows—Beloved of God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 70)

1 Kings 17:13 make me thereof a little cake first

You have to love the boldness of Elijah! Most would consider his request exceedingly insensitive, rude, and demanding. As if to say, “I don’t care that

you're about to die, make me something *first*." Was he Israel's biggest male chauvinist pig? Was he a beggar? What was she to think of this man who, having lived in the wilderness by the brook for years, would have looked unkempt and sun scorched? He was telling her to "fear not," but he was probably an awfully fearsome sight.

Modern political correctness would attribute rudeness to Elijah, but the request was a test. How would the widow respond? Certainly, she had been praying for relief and none had come. Likely, she had given up on God's rescuing favor. How then would she respond to such a heartless demand from such a fearsome looking man?

From the Book of Mormon, we read, "ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6). This could not be more the case in the trial faced by the widow. Her faith must be tried. We should learn the lesson of a lifetime from this episode. Just when life seems the most unfair, just when our prayers seem unheard, just when we feel emotionally like we are ready to make our last meal and die, that is when the Lord blesses us. We must expect at some point in our lives to be sorely tried—having our very heart strings wrenched as the widow of Zarephath.

Joseph Smith

You will have all kinds of trials to pass through. And it is quite as necessary for you to be tried as it was for Abraham and other men of God, and God will feel after you, and He will take hold of you and wrench your very heart strings, and if you cannot stand it you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial Kingdom of God. (John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, 24:264)

1 Kings 17:15 she went and did according to the saying of Elijah

Jeffrey R. Holland

As he entered the city in his weary condition [Elijah] met his benefactress, who was undoubtedly as weak and wasted as he.... Elijah's pitiful circumstances were obvious. Furthermore, the widow had been prepared by the Lord for this request. But in her own weakened and dispirited condition, the prophet's last entreaty was more than this faithful little woman could bear. In her hunger and fatigue and motherly anguish she cried out to the stranger, "As the Lord 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 [which tells us how small her fire needed to be], that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

But Elijah was on the Lord's errand. Israel's future—including the future of this very widow and her son—was at stake. His prophetic duty made him more bold than he might normally have wanted to be.

"Fear not," he said to her, "but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Then this understated expression of faith—as great, under these circumstances, as any I know in the scriptures. The record says simply, "And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah." Perhaps uncertain what the cost of her faith would be not only to herself but to her son as well, she first took her small loaf to Elijah, obviously trusting that if there were not enough bread left over, at least she and her son would have died in an act of pure charity. The story goes on, of course, to a very happy ending for her and for her son.

This woman is like another widow whom Christ admired so much—she who cast her farthing, her two mites, into the synagogue treasury and thereby gave more, Jesus said, than all others who had given that day.

Unfortunately, the names of these two women are not recorded in the scriptures, but if I am ever so privileged in the eternities to meet them, I would like to fall at their feet and say "Thank you." Thank you for the beauty of your lives, for the wonder of your example, for the godly spirit within you prompting such "charity out of a pure heart." ("A Handful of Meal and a Little Oil," *Ensign*, May 1996, 29)

1 Kings 17:17-24 The death and raising of the widow's son

"As though the widow's faith had not been tried sufficiently, the Lord had yet another test that would stretch and fortify her faith beyond what she had thus far experienced. After receiving daily replenishing of her jar of flour and cruse of oil for three years, the widow saw her son become ill and die... Her faith cracked. She accused Elijah and the Lord of abandoning her.

“We can become complacent with God’s daily miracles. During times of peace and prosperity, we may gradually lose the awe we initially experienced when His grace dramatically sustained us beyond our natural abilities. Because of His constant gifts, we may begin to expect God’s enabling power as something we deserve or have even earned. In the case of the widow of Zarephath, she may have felt forsaken by the Lord when He took her son’s life away, perhaps because she had begun to pride herself on the daily service she rendered to Elijah by cooking his meals and providing him shelter. Had she therefore falsely assumed that God would shield her from future trials as His gratitude for her service?

“Amid the cacophony of emotions and attempts to understand, the widow cried out to Elijah, ‘What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?’ (1 Kings 17:18). Here was the greater test of her faith in the Lord. Was her love and trust in God dependent on the absence of pain, difficulties, and loss, or was she loyal to Him without condition? Could she be stretched to wholeheartedly accept and understand that everything God does for His children is for their benefit—even painful situations?

“...Reverence for God is important during peaceful and prosperous times, but how do we respond when a crisis erupts? Where do we turn when everyone around seems to abandon us? Do our hearts become hardened and bitter or soft and pliable by turning unflinchingly to God for the solace that only He can give? A Book of Mormon king wisely taught that turning to the Lord in times of loss was not enough. We must also continue to trust Him when no solution seems possible and actively serve Him even when we don’t know how He will rescue us (Mosiah 7:33).” (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009], 230-231)

Thomas S. Monson

Consistently the Master has taught, by example, His concern for the widow. To the grieving widow at Nain, bereft of her only son, He came personally and to the dead son restored the breath of life—and to the astonished widow her son. To the widow at Zarephath, who with her son faced imminent starvation, He sent the prophet Elijah with the power to teach faith as well as provide food.

We may say to ourselves, "But that was long ago and ever so far away." I respond, "Is there a city called Zarephath near your home? Is there a town known as Nain?" We may know our cities as Columbus or Coalville, Detroit or Denver. Whatever the name, there lives within each city the widow deprived of

her companion and often her child. The need is the same. The affliction is real. (*Conference Classics*, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981-1984], 1: 3)

The Priesthood of Elijah

Latter-day Saints enjoy a unique understanding of the mission of the Prophet Elijah. Every Jewish Passover, a chair is left empty for Elijah's return. Do they understand the significance of that promised visit? What does it mean? Why does Elijah's return matter? Ironically, the last place we can glean any understanding is the account of Elijah's mortal ministry. The sealing power is not mentioned; the higher ordinances of the temple are never discussed. In fact, Elijah almost seems to be the only righteous soul left in Israel, not the great administrator of blessings pertaining to the higher priesthood.

Something important was left out of the record—yet again. Certainly, there is evidence that important puzzle pieces are missing. There is something more to Elijah than the record declares. Other religious traditions and the Malachi prophecy suggest the importance of a later mission.

Joseph Fielding Smith

Elijah occupies a place in the legends of many peoples. We are informed that among the Greeks he is the patron saint of the mountains, and many of the mountains in Greece are named for him. In the Roman Catholic Church, he is regarded as the founder of the order known as "the barefooted Carmelites."

The Mohammedans likewise have honored him in their traditions, and he is often confounded with the great and mysterious El-Khudr, the eternal wanderer, who having drunk the waters of life, remains in everlasting youth and appears from time to time to correct the wrongs of men. Of course this comes from the fact of Elijah's translation.

Among the Jews he finds a place of honor in their history second to none of the prophets. He is mentioned on many occasions in the New Testament, some of the time in reference to his labors and ministry in Israel when he dwelt among men, and at other times, in reference to his future mission.

Edersheim in his work, *The Temple*, says: "To this day, in every Jewish home, at a certain part of the Paschal service... the door is opened to admit Elijah the prophet as forerunner of the Messiah, while appropriate passages are at the same time read which foretell the destruction of all heathen nations..."

It was, I am informed, on the third day of April, 1836, that the Jews, in their homes at the Paschal feast, opened their doors for Elijah to enter. On that very day Elijah did enter—not in the home of the Jews to partake of the Passover with them—but he appeared in the house of the Lord, erected to his name and received by the Lord in Kirtland, and there bestowed his keys to bring to pass the very things for which these Jews, assembled in their homes, were seeking. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., edited by Bruce R. McConkie [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-1956], 2: 101)

The legend of Elijah comes in part from the Malachi prophecy. While we may not be able to appreciate his prophetic mission from the record of his mortal ministry, from Malachi we know that Elijah must be something special. His prophetic mission was the last message of the Old Testament—a haunting exclamation point that hung over subsequent centuries of apostasy. At their first encounter, this was one of the few passages quoted to Joseph Smith by Moroni:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. (Mal. 4:5-6)

But what is the curse? What would happen without Elijah's priesthood?

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. (Mal. 4:1)

The scorching heat of the Second Coming will burn the roots, consume the branches, and leave only the stubble. The roots represent one's ancestors; the branches represent one's descendants. Properly understood then, without Elijah's priesthood, souls will be left separated from family and loved ones in the eternities. There will be no connection with parents or children! What a terrifying prospect! The scorching separation of the Second Coming would be painfully permanent.

Theodore M. Burton

In order to understand this passage of scripture, for root read “progenitors” or “ancestors” and for branch read “posterity” or “children.” Unless, then, through obedience to the laws of God you can qualify yourself to go to the temple and have your family sealed to you, you will live forever separately and singly in an unmarried state. It seems to me that would be a very lonesome type of existence—to live without the warming influence of family life among those you love, who in turn love you.

God said of those who were not willing to pay the full price of exaltation through full obedience to his whole law: “Therefore, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.

“For these angels did not abide in my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever.” (D&C 132:16–17.)

It is for this reason that the Lord promised that he would reveal unto us the priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the second coming of the Lord, to plant in our hearts the promises that were made to our fathers so that our hearts could be turned to our fathers and to our children. If we cannot achieve this goal of eternal family exaltation, our lives on this earth will be utterly wasted when Christ shall come the second time. (“Salvation and Exaltation,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 79)

Joseph Smith

Elijah was the last Prophet that held the keys of the Priesthood, and who will, before the last dispensation, restore the authority and deliver the keys of the Priesthood, in order that all the ordinances may be attended to in righteousness... The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth; and to receive, obtain, and perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God, even unto the turning of the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children unto the fathers, even those who are in heaven.

...What is this office and work of Elijah? It is one of the greatest and most important subjects that God has revealed. He should send Elijah to seal the children to the fathers, and the fathers to the children.

Now was this merely confined to the living, to settle difficulties with families on earth? By no means. It was a far greater work. Elijah! what would you do if you were here? Would you confine your work to the living alone? No: I would refer you to the Scriptures, where the subject is manifest: that is, without us, they could not be made perfect, nor we without them; the fathers without the children, nor the children without the fathers.

I wish you to understand this subject, for it is important; and if you receive it, this is the spirit of Elijah, that we redeem our dead, and connect ourselves with our fathers which are in heaven, and seal up our dead to come forth in the first resurrection; and here we want the power of Elijah to seal those who dwell on earth to those who dwell in heaven. This is the power of Elijah and the keys of the kingdom of Jehovah.

Let us suppose a case. Suppose the great God who dwells in heaven should reveal himself to Father Cutler here, by the opening heavens, and tell him, I offer up a decree that whatsoever you seal on earth with your decree, I will seal it in heaven; you have the power then; can it be taken off? No. Then what you seal on earth, by the keys of Elijah, is sealed in heaven; and this is the power of Elijah, and this is the difference between the spirit and power of Elias and Elijah; for while the spirit of Elias is a forerunner, the power of Elijah is sufficient to make our calling and election sure. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, selected and arranged by Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976], 172, 337, 338)

Joseph Fielding Smith

What was the nature of his mission to the earth in these latter days? It was to restore power and authority which once was given to men on the earth and which is essential to the complete salvation and exaltation of man in the kingdom of God. In other words, Elijah came to restore to the earth, by conferring on mortal prophets duly commissioned of the Lord, the fulness of the power of priesthood. This priesthood holds the keys of binding and sealing on earth and in heaven of all the ordinances and principles pertaining to the salvation of man, that they may thus become valid in the celestial kingdom of God.

During the days of his ministry Elijah held this authority, and the Lord gave him power over all things on earth and that through his ministry whatever was done should be ratified, or sealed, in the heavens and recognized of full force by the Eternal Father. This power effects and vitalizes every ordinance performed by duly commissioned officers holding divine power on the earth.

It is by virtue of this authority that ordinances are performed in the temples for both the living and the dead. It is the power which unites for eternity husbands and wives, when they enter into marriage according to the eternal plan. It is the authority by which parents obtain the claim of parenthood, concerning their children, through all eternity and not only for time, which makes eternal the family in the kingdom of God. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., edited by Bruce R. McConkie [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-1956], 2: 117)