

Lessons from the Life of Elijah



17:17-24
COVENANT
DEMANDS AND
BLESSINGS ARE
CARRIED OUTSIDE
THE COVENANT
CIRCLE



COVENANT DEMANDS AND BLESSINGS ARE
CARRIED OUTSIDE THE COVENANT CIRCLE

17:17-18

Some time later . . . It appears the Word of the Lord has suffered a setback.

. . . the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. The boy's death suddenly broke upon the lives of Elijah and the woman as a great riddle. It shattered her sense of security.

- The miracle after all was a constant presence and reminder in her own house. All around people were dying in hunger and misery. But not the widow.
- The shock posed a burning problem for both the widow and Elijah. "WHY?!!" The boy's death was not ordinary, it appears extraordinary.
- Elijah even prays "*LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?*". The Lord clearly had done it. And that cried for explanation.



COVENANT DEMANDS AND BLESSINGS ARE CARRIED OUTSIDE THE COVENANT CIRCLE

17:17-18

"What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" The woman believed it had something also to do with her – a perspective likely bound up with her heathen perspective.

Then he cried out to the LORD, "LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Essentially Elijah reframes the widow's conclusion in his prayer to Yahweh.

- "Even upon the widow!" These words contained the whole problem.
- There are several answers and they all must focus on the unfolding Word of the Lord.
- First, through the death of this child Elijah must play the prophet to his hostess.
- Second, the widow must now deal with Elijah as a prophet.



COVENANT DEMANDS AND BLESSINGS ARE CARRIED OUTSIDE THE COVENANT CIRCLE

17:20

Then he cried out to the LORD, "LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"

- Here was an inflection point in the plan of God. God had indeed caused the boy's death. And now Elijah knew he could not continue on in Zarephath.
- Away from the widow with the dead boy in his room, the prophet was free to voice his anxious concerns and raise his burning questions to the Lord.
- Elijah saw only one path through which the Word of God could win recognition – the path of miracles.
- So Elijah prayed for this outcome. And as in his earlier prayer for judgment, here his prayer was full of energy.
- The Lord was using this miracle to typify I believe the life of Israel.



COVENANT DEMANDS AND BLESSINGS ARE CARRIED OUTSIDE THE COVENANT CIRCLE

17:23

Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

- The first prophecy to the woman did not contain the light of personal revelation. Here, the second one did.
- Note her recognition of the Word of the Lord. Here she moves from the sign to the Word. Israel remains far behind this woman.
- The woman reasoned correctly and became an eternal testament to the truthfulness of the Word.



THE WORD OF THE LORD RETURNS TO HALT COVENANT WRATH

18:1

After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab"

- Here again Elijah is before Israel as the bearer of the Word. The first meeting was to prepare Israel for a curse, the second to prepare Israel for the rain as a blessing.
- When Elijah appeared the second time, he was not repealing the curse in any way.
- Note the condition of the land when Elijah returned – not only the land scorched with famine but how the people – especially the king and his court - responded to it.
- The Word of the Lord does something to people. No one is unaffected by its power. Everyone takes a position – neutrality is never an option. Everyone is either yes or no.
- Here is God's sovereign independence. God determines when and where He speaks to Ahab.



THE WORD OF THE LORD RETURNS TO HALT COVENANT WRATH

18:1

"... and I will send rain on the land."

- Elijah was sent back because the Lord wanted to end the drought. The blessing of rain was a covenant blessing. And withholding it was covenant wrath.
- Wait, why did God favor His people this way? Had they repented? In the past, the Lord plagued His people until they repented. Had Ahab's will had outlasted the will of God?
- Judgment was a phase in God's reaching out for Israel. And blessing is a new phase.
- Ultimately the basis of God's response to His people is Christ who fulfills the covenant.
- The Lord carried on with His plans by blessing Israel, so that the work of realizing the promises could be completed.
- Here we see something of the triumph of God as He walks the paths of His sovereignty.
- Both judgment and salvation are from the Lord – Psalm 98:1-3, Isaiah 63:1-9.



THE WORD OF THE LORD RETURNS TO HALT COVENANT WRATH

18:1

Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals."

- Ahab's deeds revealed his hardheart. As shepherd of Israel, Ahab fought the Lord.
- This was the opposite response of another king who experienced a 3-year famine. Who? David in 2 Samuel 21:1 because of the Gibeonites. David had to inquire, but Ahab knew.
- What Ahab did do is also telling. He calls in Obadiah, his prime minister, to a special meeting where the king and Obadiah would traverse the land in search of water.
- Ahab went himself to show solidarity with his people and to shore up his popularity and avoid revolt. But it was the animals that were Ahab's first concern. (Like Jonah)
- Ahab knew rain would only fall on one condition, that the king humble himself before Yahweh and lead his people in repentance. But that was too high a price for Ahab.



THE WORD OF THE LORD RETURNS TO HALT COVENANT WRATH

18:2

So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.

- The attitude of Ahab and Jezebel is tied directly to the misery in which the land had been plunged. Their attitude was their answer to God's judgments.
- There was no human explanation for the suffering, God must be dealt with.

Now the famine was severe in Samaria

- Remember why the famine? It was the blatant sin of the people that had called for judgment from the covenant.
- See the blessings in Deuteronomy 28:1-12
- See the judgments in Deuteronomy 28:15-22:4
- The famine must be understood as judgment, delivered by the Word of the Lord, as a result of sin.



THE WORD OF THE LORD RETURNS TO HALT COVENANT WRATH

18:3

Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator.

- Elijah had two revelations on his return –rejection of Ahab and faithfulness of Obadiah.
- Obadiah revered the Lord greatly – what a beautiful testimony of the deep impression this man left on his people.
- The name Obadiah means “servant of Yahweh” and later we hear from his own mouth (18:12) that he feared the Lord from his youth on.
- How was Obadiah, a servant of the Lord, tolerated in Jezebel's court?
- We do know Obadiah was a believer and the Scripture now shows us the actions he took in faith – the merciful deed where 100 prophets are spared in Israel.



THE WORD OF THE LORD RETURNS TO HALT COVENANT WRATH

18:3-4

(Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. . . . Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.)

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18:3-4

While Jezebel was killing off the LORD's prophets, . . .

- The persecution of believers by Jezebel was another level of oppression. The “7000 who did not bow the knee to Baal” and “those that did bow” all received the judgment of the covenant. They all suffered in the famine.
- But here were especially faithful men singled out for persecution because they were faithful. Many died.
- “Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered” was Jezebel’s strategy (in this case shepherds). And this remains the strategy down the end of time
- Yahweh is the Lord and His will shall prevail. Some he allowed to be killed, others He spared. But the Lord also raised up Obadiah to resist Jezebel.
- God always preserves a remnant.