

## Elijah. Part 2: 1 Kings 17. 4-16.

### READING

And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, '... thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there'.

So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, 'Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee'.

So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, 'Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink'. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, 'Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand'.

And she said, '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, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die'.

And Elijah said unto her, 'Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: 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"'.<sup>1</sup>

And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. 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.

1 Kings 17. 2-16 (*King James Version*)

### INTRODUCTION

Part 1 of our study opened with the claim that, although we rightly 'regard the incident on Mount Carmel in the latter section of 1 Kings 18 as the great and decisive confrontation between Jehovah and Ba'al', in reality 'the battle was joined' in chapter 17.

We later noted that, in effect, Elijah's message to King Ahab, reported in the first verse of 1 Kings 17, was 'a declaration of war', not by Elijah on Ahab, nor on Jezebel nor on Jezebel's father (IttoBaal I) but 'a declaration of war' by Elijah's God, Jehovah, on Jezebel's god ... on Ba'al!

We now pick up the threads at 1 Kings 17 verse 4.

## 1. GOD'S PROVISION FOR ELIJAH: THE RAVENS AT THE BROOK CHERITH

### GOD'S PROMISE TO SUPPLY ELIJAH'S NEEDS

**Verse 4.** 'Thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there'.

The supply which the Lord provided for Elijah at the brook Cherith was, in part, *natural* ('the brook', which was so natural a supply that it would dry up in time if there were no rain) and, in part, *supernatural* ('the ravens').

If God had employed human beings to take Elijah his food, they might have divulged his hiding-place,<sup>1</sup> either deliberately or by accident. Even if not, they might have been tracked by Ahab's spies. If a dog or some domestic animal had gone out each morning and evening carrying food supplies, people might well have noticed the regular journeys and made investigations.<sup>2</sup>

One way or another, Ahab would soon have discovered Elijah's whereabouts.

But birds flying with flesh into the desert would arouse no suspicions. If noticed at all, it would be assumed they were carrying food to their young; ravens are known to roost in desolate rocky areas,<sup>3</sup> similar to the ravine through which the brook Cherith flowed.

God, therefore, arranged for provisions to be flown in to Elijah (two flights a day; one in the morning and one in the evening), courtesy of the 'Raven Catering Company'.

God could, of course, (i) have *rained down manna* from heaven<sup>4</sup> for Elijah or (ii) have *brought up quails*<sup>5</sup> for him, both of which He had done for the Israelites in the wilderness.<sup>6</sup> But, instead, He chose to feed Elijah through the ravens.

But could (loosely speaking<sup>7</sup>) 'birds of prey' such as ravens be depended upon? Naturally, far from being providers, ravens are known to be scavengers.<sup>8</sup> Was it not far more likely, then, that they would devour the food themselves than that they would bring it to the hungry prophet?<sup>9</sup>

Yes, of course it was. But Elijah's trust rested not in the natural instinct of the birds, but in the faithful word of Him who 'will not'<sup>10</sup> – and, indeed, who 'cannot'<sup>11</sup> – lie.

Elijah need have no fear. It was the living God who said, '*I have commanded the ravens*'. He is the One:

- (i) who had once directed the right number of each species of living thing into Noah's ark;<sup>12</sup>
- (ii) who had once directed two milch cows to bring back a very different kind of 'ark' out of the land of the Philistines;<sup>13</sup>
- (iii) who had once directed a lion to meet, to tear and to kill (but not to devour!) a disobedient prophet;<sup>14</sup>
- (iv) who would one day direct two she bears to deal with a group of mocking youths;<sup>15</sup>
- (v) who would one day direct hungry lions to leave unharmed His aged servant;<sup>16</sup>
- (vi) who would one day direct a great fish to provide three days' free hospitality for a reluctant preacher;<sup>17</sup>
- (vii) who would one day direct a much smaller fish in the Sea of Galilee to collect a coin of sufficient value to pay the temple tribute for His Son and one of His disciples, and then come in to the shore at the very right moment to connect with Peter's shiny hook.<sup>18</sup>

Surely, such a One would have no problem directing the ravens twice a day to the brook Cherith. When He says, 'Come', they come and when He says, 'Do this', they do it.<sup>19</sup>

## **ELIJAH'S OBEDIENCE**

**Verse 5.** 'He went and did according unto the word of the Lord'.

Elijah would have known that, according to God's own law (obedience to which Elijah aimed to restore His people), the raven was an unclean bird, which the godly Jew was forbidden to eat.<sup>20</sup> Admittedly, Elijah wasn't told to *eat the ravens*, yet God still *chose an unclean bird to feed Elijah*. Perhaps God did so to remind the prophet – and us – that He, the Lord, is sovereign. You and I need to submit to whatever methods the Lord employs to supply our needs.

Full marks to Elijah. With my eye on the answer which the representatives of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh once gave to Joshua,<sup>21</sup> Elijah went where the Lord sent him, and he did what the Lord commanded him. Let us never forget that, in the prayer our Lord taught his disciples, the petition, 'Thy will be done', precedes the petition, 'Give us this day our daily bread'.<sup>22</sup>

## **BREAKFAST AND EVENING MEAL DELIVERED BY AIR**

**Verse 6.** 'The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening'.

Every day, the two mercy flights arrived as regular as clockwork, with their precious cargo delivered safely on each occasion.<sup>23</sup>

### **(i) Not an angel**

God could, of course, have sent:

- (i) an angel to minister to Elijah, as He would (twice) at Beersheba later,<sup>24</sup> or
- (ii) several angels to minister to him, as He would, almost 900 years later, to His Son in another wilderness.<sup>25</sup>

But now He chooses to send provisions by winged messengers of an altogether different kind, demonstrating, clearly, that, when He pleases, He can fulfil His will and purpose as effortlessly and as effectively through the *lowliest of creatures* as He can through the *most exalted*.

### **(ii) Surpassing others**

And I note that, in the event, Elijah actually fares better than the Lord's other surviving prophets, who were fed by Ahab's governor, Obadiah, for those prophets had to make do with only 'bread and water',<sup>26</sup> whereas, together with the water from the brook and the bread, *Elijah had meat on his menu!*

Indeed, Elijah fared better even than the children of Israel had when God had fed them miraculously in the wilderness of Sin. According to Exodus 16, the Lord said to Moses, 'At even ye shall eat flesh (quails, that is), and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread (manna, that is)'.<sup>27</sup> Bread for breakfast and flesh for evening meal, that is. But Elijah enjoyed *both 'bread and flesh'* for both *morning and evening meals*.

### **(iii) 'Flesh'?**

But I think we can safely say that the ravens didn't bring Elijah quails to eat. I wonder whether Elijah ever asked himself what kind of meat they did bring, or where they had found it?<sup>28</sup>

'It's probably better not to ask, Elijah! Just give thanks for your meal, tuck in, and rejoice in the double daily evidence that Jehovah is giving you that, indeed, He *is God*—that He is, in the words of Moses in the context of the supply of quails, 'the Lord *your God*'!<sup>29</sup>

### **(iv) Ravens: fed and feeding**

Both Old and New Testaments assert that (as is true of all God's creatures) ravens are fed by God Himself:

(i) The Lord asks Job, 'Who provides for the raven his food? when its young ones cry to God, they wander for lack of meat';<sup>30</sup>

(ii) 'He gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry'.<sup>31</sup>

(iii) 'Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them'.<sup>32</sup>

And the One who Himself faithfully provided the ravens with their own food had every right to command them to transport food with equal faithfulness for the benefit of His servant if He so wished.

One modern commentator makes the claim, 'Ravens do not even feed their own young'.<sup>33</sup> Nor is this idea anything new. A much earlier commentator (writing almost 190 years ago) stated that ravens, 'voracious and unfeeling ... would leave their own young to starve'.<sup>34</sup> If such claims are true, it would certainly add another dimension to<sup>35</sup> the miracle of verse 6!

But, alas for those who find the idea attractive, it *isn't* true! Both parent ravens feed their young; they do this 'by regurgitating food and water stored in a throat pouch'.<sup>36</sup>

But I was pleased, for Elijah's sake, to note that the text of verse 6, if anything, suggests that the bread and meat brought by the ravens to Cherith was still just that, bread and meat—doing service as food for the first time.

And I can tell you that Elijah's ravens certainly did a lot more for him than Noah's raven ever did for him, when he sent it out from the ark to establish whether or not the waters of the flood had receded. You may remember that Noah's raven didn't bring him so much as one olive leaf,<sup>37</sup> whereas Elijah's ravens dutifully brought him bread and flesh every morning and every evening.<sup>38</sup>

### **(v) God's working through unusual means**

And even today, there are occasions when the Lord uses the most unlikely and unusual of means to supply the needs of His people.

For my part, I enjoy the story recounted by F. B. Meyer, a Bible expositor of a bygone day:

'A little (German) boy, having read about this incident with his widowed mother one wintry night, as they sat in a fireless room beside a bare table, asked her if he might set the door open for God's ravens to come in; he was so sure that they must be on their way. The burgomaster (the 'mayor') of the town, passing by, was attracted by the sight of the open door and entered, inquiring the cause. When he learned the reason, he said, 'I will be God's raven'; and relieved their need then and afterward'.<sup>39</sup>

And happy incidents of this kind have been multiplied a thousand times over through the wonderful providential workings of a God who is good at doing things like that.

## **THE DRY BROOK**

**Verse 7.** 'And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land'.

The Hebrew word translated 'and it came to pass'<sup>40</sup> is repeated in verse 17. In both cases, the relevant happening necessitated fresh action by Elijah.

### **(i) A natural occurrence**

Needless to say, the *miraculously* provided food supply didn't fail; Elijah's black-coated waiters turned up for duty each mealtime as directed. But the water supply wasn't miraculous, any more than would be the water supply later in Zarephath.<sup>41</sup>

### **(ii) Round 1 to Jehovah!**

Although this was the very brook to which the Lord had directed Elijah, the fact that, in time, it ran dry was no great challenge to Elijah's faith. It was, indeed, the very opposite. This because Elijah knew full well what the reader is told in verse 6; namely, that the brook dried up 'because there had been no rain in the land'.

And why was that, pray? It was for no other reason than that Elijah had *prayed* that there *might be no rain*<sup>42</sup> and that his word to King Ahab<sup>43</sup> was being fulfilled.<sup>44</sup>

The *failing* of the waters of the brook was as much the fulfilment of God's word *through* His servant in verse 1 as the *unfailing* visits of the ravens were the fulfilment of God's word *to* His servant in verse 4.

I repeat the point: 'the *failing* of the waters of the brook was as much the fulfilment of God's word *through* Elijah in verse 1, as the *unfailing* visits of the ravens were the fulfilment of God's word *to* him in verse 4.

In Part 1 of our studies, we imagined Elijah saying to Jezebel through his declaration of verse 1, 'Since your Ba'al is the supposed provider of rain and since Jehovah announces that He is going to withhold it, the gauntlet is down. The contest has well and truly begun. It is very much a case of "Seconds out, round one"'.  
The dry brook declared loudly, '**Round 1 to Jehovah!**'

The dry brook declared loudly, '**Round 1 to Jehovah!**'

### **(iii) Putting trust in the Giver and not in His gifts**

The waters of the brook may fail but the Lord never does.<sup>45</sup> And if, as Elijah announced to Ahab, his God lived,<sup>46</sup> what did it matter if the brook ran dry?<sup>47</sup>

But how slow *we* are to learn that our God is greater than any number of the mercies He bestows. Sometimes He sees fit to withdraw those mercies—sometimes we have to face a brook which dries up! This may take the form of bereavement, the breakdown of health, a financial difficulty, the loss of employment or the sudden failure of some other source of supply.

Perhaps our 'dried-up brook' is the Lord's way of teaching us to trust, not in the *blessings* but in the *Blesser*—His way of teaching us to rest, not in the *gifts* but in the *Giver*. The big question for you and me is, 'Will we trust God when *our* brook dries up?'

### **(iv) What now?**

But what next for Elijah?

Now that the *natural* supply of water to which God directed Elijah has failed, will God supply him with his water in a *supernatural* way, as He has been supplying his food?

We know that He certainly could have done that, had He so wished. Had God not, on more than one occasion, brought water out of the rock to quench the thirst of an entire nation?<sup>48</sup> And had He not brought water out of a split hollow rock at Lehi for Samson's sake?<sup>49</sup> Perhaps now the Lord will break open the rocks at Cherith to satisfy Elijah's thirst?

## **2. GOD'S PROVISION FOR ELIJAH: THE WIDOW AT ZAREPHATH**

But, no!

Instead, for His own reasons, the Lord gives Elijah his marching orders. And, on the face of it, they are mighty odd marching orders!

### A MOST UNLIKELY PLACE?

**Verses 8-9a.** ‘The word of the Lord came unto him, saying, “Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon”’.

#### (i) Zarephath: a long journey

Elijah was currently situated at Cherith by the Jordan in ‘the east’,<sup>50</sup> whereas Zarephath was situated far off in the *north west*—on the Mediterranean Sea coast, between Tyre and Sidon.<sup>51</sup> The town of Zarephath lay way beyond the northern border of Israel as it then was.<sup>52</sup>

From Cherith to Zarephath involved a journey of well over 80 miles, right across the kingdom of Ahab<sup>53</sup> – ‘over mountain and plain’ quite literally – and that is a long way to travel on foot!

A lesser man than Elijah might well have objected:

‘Why Zarephath, Lord? Why not the southern kingdom of Judah, which is much nearer? As you know, Lord, many of my fellow countrymen left Israel for Judah less than forty years ago because they saw that you were with the then godly King Asa, who ruled there.<sup>54</sup> Now Asa’s son, Jehoshaphat, reigns there and he has no time personally for either Ba’al or Asherah.<sup>55</sup> Why not send me to Judah, Lord, which, apart from being so much nearer geographically (and easier, therefore, on my feet) is so much more to my spiritual taste?’

To which, I suppose, the Lord might then have replied:

‘That is as maybe, Elijah, but are you not aware that it was only a short time ago that this same King Jehoshaphat, in an act of folly, allied himself with Ahab and Jezebel by taking their daughter Athaliah as wife for his son Joram.<sup>56</sup> And, given that Ahab, having failed to track you down in Israel, is at this very moment taking oaths of the monarchs of *all* nations and kingdoms around that they aren’t harbouring you,<sup>57</sup> Judah would hardly be the wisest or the safest choice as a place of refuge for you’.

And yet, even if neither Israel nor Judah could be guaranteed to afford shelter for Elijah, any place which ‘*belongs to Sidon*’<sup>58</sup> would probably have been the last spot which anyone in Elijah’s day would have recommended as a haven for one of the Lord’s prophets.

#### (ii) Zarephath and Jezebel

Zarephath was not only situated less than eight miles south of Sidon but also, as indicated on ancient Assyrian inscriptions, was very much dependent upon Sidon, falling as it did within the domain and under the rule of the ‘king of the Sidonians’,<sup>59</sup> who we know, at the time, to be none other than Ethba’al (IttoBa’al I), the father of Jezebel.<sup>60</sup> Zarephath was located, therefore, in the very area from which Elijah’s deadliest enemy had come.

And yet, for these very reasons, such a location was, in reality, the safest place of all, for I think it is fair to assume that the kingdom of IttoBa’al would have been the last place where Ahab would have thought of looking for the man he dubbed, ‘the troubler of Israel’.<sup>61</sup>

There is also a lovely twist to the Lord’s choice of Zarephath as a secure refuge for His servant. It has been well said: ‘Jezebel was Elijah’s greatest enemy; yet, to show her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him even in her country’.<sup>62</sup>

The Lord, that is, will demonstrate that His prophet, who, thanks to Jezebel, isn’t at all safe *in his own country*, will, with His protective hand over him, be altogether safe *in hers*!

I suppose it is true to say therefore that, having formerly spread for Elijah, at Cherith, ‘a table in the wilderness’,<sup>63</sup> the Lord now spreads for him, at Zarephath, ‘a table in the presence of his enemies’.<sup>64</sup>

#### (iii) Zarephath and Ba’al

But, far more to the point, the land of Sidon formed the heartland of Ba’al’s kingdom. Zarephath therefore nestled close by the very source and centre of the Ba’al worship which had recently flooded into Israel!

And so, as a further way of discrediting Ba’al, the Lord deliberately hides His prophet in Ba’al’s own backyard. I am reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus to the first century church at Pergamos, ‘I know where you *dwell*, where Satan’s throne is’.<sup>65</sup> I note that, according to verse 8, Elijah was sent to ‘*dwell*’ where, in effect, Ba’al’s throne was.

## A MOST UNLIKELY HOSTESS

**Verse 9b.** 'Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee'.

Elijah isn't given the widow's name, address or post code, nor is he told how he is to distinguish her from other widows. He knows only that, from now on, his provision is to come, not courtesy of the birds of the air but through human hands.

I note that the very same words are employed by God about the ravens and the widow: 'I have commanded ... to sustain (to feed) you there'.<sup>66</sup> As one writer expresses it, 'God has ways of reaching the mysterious animal instinct and the mysterious human will, and each, in its own way, obeys'.<sup>67</sup>

From now on, Elijah's provision would come, I say, through human hands—and through the least likely hands Elijah could have imagined. Widows were among the poorest of all people in the ancient world, and could therefore be expected to be among the very first to run out of food in times of drought and famine.

And, as I understand it, a widow with sons or a son (as was the case with the woman God chose to provide for His prophet) was the most vulnerable of all. In the Ancient Near East, 'a childless widow was the responsibility of the family, but a widow-mother ... had no such provision. ... This situation makes Elijah's dependence on the widow-mother more poignant'.<sup>68</sup>

## ELIJAH'S OBEDIENCE—AGAIN

**Verse 10a.** 'So he arose and went to Zarephath'.

It has been suggested that 'the prophet's national instincts would be against going into a Gentile area; his religious instincts would lead him to abhor a hot-bed of Ba'al-worship; and his manly instincts would cause him to shrink from being a burden upon a widow!'<sup>69</sup>

But to such a man as Elijah, a word from the Lord was enough. No questions, no arguments, no complaints. As earlier to Cherith,<sup>70</sup> so now to Zarephath, in unhesitating obedience, 'he ... went'.

## 'BEHOLD, THE WIDOW WOMAN'

**Verse 10b.** 'And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks'.

### (i) 'There'.

Although, as we noted earlier, Elijah had been given no means of identifying the chosen 'widow woman' and although he had no appointment fixed, yet, 'when he came to the gate ('the entrance'<sup>71</sup>) of the city, behold, the widow woman was there (literally, '*behold there, a widow woman*').

That is, when Elijah eventually completes his journey of 80-plus miles, he finds the Lord's provision waiting for him!

### (ii) 'Behold'.

'Behold'—'look at this', 'ponder this'. 'Marvel', the text is shouting out, 'that, as part and parcel of that providence by which the living God overrules events in all our lives, this particular woman should be at the entrance to the city at the very moment God's prophet arrived'.

We may well compare other occasions in the Old Testament when:

(i) after Abraham's servant prayed that the Lord would direct him to the young woman the Lord had chosen as wife for Isaac, we read, '*behold, Rebekah came out*',<sup>72</sup>

(ii) after young Ruth chanced to light on a portion of a field belonging to Boaz, we read, '*behold, Boaz came*',<sup>73</sup> and

(iii) immediately after David asked God to turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness, '*behold, Hushai the Archite (the man whom God would use to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel) came to meet him*'.<sup>74</sup>

Turning to the New Testament, we can compare the occasion when, even as the apostle Peter was questioning at Joppa what the vision of the sheet-like container descending from heaven might mean, '*behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius ... stood at the gate*'.<sup>75</sup>

It is wonderful to know that we (and our times<sup>76</sup>) are in the best of hands ... assured that God's clock always keeps perfect time!

### ***(iii) The widow's privilege***

For her part, the widow had gone out that morning to gather sticks, not to greet a guest. She had gone to the entrance of Zarephath that day on an errand (a tragic errand) of her own, to gather a few dry sticks to kindle a fire to cook her last meal. But, unknown to her, this widow was also on an errand from God.

She thinks only about feeding her son and herself with one last cake, with no idea of sustaining 'a man of God'<sup>77</sup> out of her all-but-empty barrel ('jar') of wheat-flour.

This widow woman had no way of knowing that she had been chosen by God to provide board and lodge for one of the two men who would one day appear in glory with the Lord Jesus on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration!<sup>78</sup>

### ***(iv) The widow's unintended role***

The Lord had assured Elijah that He had 'commanded' a widow to sustain him *there*<sup>79</sup>, using, as we noted previously, the very same words (both in Hebrew and Greek) which He had of the ravens, 'I have *commanded* the ravens to *feed you there*',<sup>80</sup> the word 'commanded' being used in both cases with the sense of 'ordained', 'appointed'.

The fact that the widow was altogether unaware of this arrangement was no more of a problem to Elijah than the fact that the ravens had been unaware of it. What encouragement it is for us to know that the sovereign Lord often works out His purpose through those who know nothing of it.<sup>81</sup>

### ***(v) The widow's personal need***

Not, of course, that the widow was able to 'sustain' Elijah out of her own resources; she wasn't even able to sustain herself. This desolate and starving woman had now, in the words of Annie Johnson Flint's great hymn, 'He giveth more grace', literally, 'reach[ed] the end of' her 'hoarded resources'.<sup>82</sup>

No, this widow at Zarephath is certainly not able to 'sustain' Elijah out of her own resources. But then she does not need to. She is to be, in effect, merely the cook! God Himself would provide the necessary ingredients.

### ***(vi) The stick-gatherer***

When Elijah first sees the widow, she is 'gathering sticks', the word translated 'gathering' suggesting foraging for discarded stubble.<sup>83</sup> No doubt, the jostling of loads when passing through the entrance to the town made it a likely place to find small pieces of wood which had been dropped.

I know of only three people in the Bible of whom we read that they gathered sticks:

(i) a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day in blatant rebellion against the known command of God and who paid dearly for his defiance.<sup>84</sup> *An act of sinfulness.*

(ii) the apostle Paul who, in the spirit of humble helpfulness, gathered a bundle of sticks to feed a fire which had been lit to warm and dry out over two hundred and seventy shivering men who had recently shipwrecked at Malta.<sup>85</sup> *An act of neighbourliness.*

(iii) this despairing widow of Zarephath, whose gathering of sticks was neither an act of sinfulness nor an act of neighbourliness but *an act of hopelessness.*

Before he arrived at Zarephath, Elijah knew only that his future source of supply was to be a *widow*. But now, as evidenced by her search for a little brushwood,<sup>86</sup> he knew it was to be a *poor widow—a very poor widow.*

## **ELIJAH'S REQUESTS AND THE WIDOW'S OATH**

**Verses 10d-11.** 'He called to her, and said, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink". And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand".'

Undismayed, the prophet sets out to check that this was indeed the widow of whom the Lord had spoken. This he does initially by the very same method of identification as had been used by Abraham's servant many years before, by asking politely for a 'little' drink.<sup>87</sup> I say 'politely', for I note that both men (the servant of Abraham and the servant of Jehovah) were careful to add their 'I pray

thee', their 'please', that is. Both these good men were marked by courtesy, a quality we do well to learn from them.<sup>88</sup>

Elijah's demands are small but his request for the widow to bring him just a '*morsel*' (a 'piece') of bread, along with a '*little water*',<sup>89</sup> serves to expose her heart-rending situation.

**Verse 12a.** 'And she said, "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake ... I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die".'

The widow immediately recognises Elijah, either as an Israelite or, more likely, given his distinctive clothing,<sup>90</sup> as a prophet of Jehovah. And the widow follows the normal practice of the day by expressing her oath in the name of the God of the person to whom she was speaking, in this case, in the name of 'Jehovah your God'. This is interesting given that Jezebel, originally from that very area, had done all she could to replace Jehovah worship in Israel by Ba'al worship.

Clearly all this widow's hopes are pinned, not on Elijah's living God but on her small jar of wheat flour and her cruse of oil.<sup>91</sup> As these both were failing, there was nothing now left for her but to prepare her 'last supper'—to cook a funeral meal for herself and her son.<sup>92</sup>

And now Elijah knows that not only is the widow to whom he has been sent a very poor widow, but also that the one to whom has been sent to sustain his *life* is herself on the verge of *death*. But then, as the apostle Paul much later, Elijah knew whom he had believed.<sup>93</sup>

## WHEAT FLOUR AND OIL

**Verse 12b.** 'An handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse'.

### (i) *The products of Phoenicia.*

The widow now has left only the most meagre supplies of wheat flour and oil, which were among the many exports of Phoenicia. In connection with the widow's 'oil', we might note (i) that, during the division of Canaan among the victorious tribes of Israel, the district of Sidon fell within the inheritance of Asher<sup>94</sup> and (ii) that, when Moses had blessed the tribes of Israel, he specifically said of Asher, 'let him dip his foot in oil',<sup>95</sup> indicating that oil was one of the principal products of the area.<sup>96</sup>

### (ii) *Drought and famine in Ba'al's own territory*

The fact that both wheat flour and oil were now in such desperately short supply proves just how severe the drought was—extending not only throughout the land of Israel but also throughout the land of Ba'al. I note the words of Elijah to the widow, 'the jar of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail (in Zarephath, of course), until the day that the Lord sends rain *on the earth*' ('*on the face of the ground*', literally),<sup>97</sup> to solve the crisis.

Ba'al's reputation had suffered badly because heaven had been shut up over Israel, over which (thanks to Jezebel's fanatical crusade), to all intent and purpose, Ba'al now effectively ruled. But I suspect that Jezebel was confident that Ba'al still reigned supreme over his own patch—that the region of Tyre and Sidon remained unaffected by the drought. After all, the normal annual rainfall in that region was over double that of the Jordan Valley (including that at Cherith).<sup>98</sup> But if that was what 'the wicked queen' expected ... she was categorically wrong!

According to Flavius Josephus, the writer Menander mentions a year-long drought in the region of Tyre and Sidon around the time of Elijah, which, it was claimed, was brought to an end by the supplications of Jezebel's father, IttoBa'al.<sup>99</sup> Well, whatever truth – *or otherwise* – lay behind that particular claim, IttoBa'al's prayers clearly weren't accomplishing very much now!

We have no way of knowing how widespread *was* the drought, nor does it matter. What matters is that it certainly stretched to Phoenicia – to the stronghold of Ba'al – and thereby discredited all the claims made for him by his worshippers.

But we should note that Ba'al wasn't believed to be the giver of rain only. Because he was regarded as the god of storm and rain, he was also believed to be the god of crops. One of his many titles was 'the son of Dagan'—'Dagan' ('Dagon' in Hebrew) being the great grain god.<sup>100</sup> As such, Ba'al was supposed to guarantee agricultural prosperity to his people.

It was, their own literature asserted, Ba'al who was 'the Lord of the Ploughed Furrows'.<sup>101</sup> According to one of their legends, the 'source of blessing to the earth was the rain of Ba'al ... a delight to the wheat in the furrow ... The ploughmen did lift up their heads, they that prepared the corn did lift up their heads on high, for *the bread had failed in their bins ... the oil had failed in their cruses*'.<sup>102</sup>



With 1 Kings 17 in front of us, we can hardly miss the significance of 'their bread bins' and 'their oil cruses' being empty. But this would only continue, the legend ran, until Ba'al rode the clouds<sup>103</sup> to the rescue of his people.

### **(iii) Where, then, is Ba'al?**

But the widow's plight raises the obvious question, 'Where, pray, is Ba'al today?' What price Ba'al, if his own people have neither bread nor oil!

And so here the contest between Jehovah and Ba'al heats up.

For here Jehovah demonstrates that, whereas (according to pagan myth) Ba'al lies impotent in the Underworld during times of drought, He<sup>104</sup> is well able (i) to provide both of Ba'al's chief commodities (corn<sup>105</sup> and oil) (ii) to sustain a widow and her son of 'Ba'al's own people', and, what is more, (iii) to do so daily in 'Ba'al's own territory' ... and to do so, indeed, just as easily as He is able to provide corn and oil for His own people in His own land when they keep His covenant, as He had promised specifically, more than once, in the Book of Deuteronomy.<sup>106</sup>

## **ELIJAH'S DEMAND AND GOD'S PROMISE**

**Verses 13-14.** 'Elijah said unto her, 'Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: 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"'.<sup>107</sup>

'He who pledged Jehovah for judgment with Ahab, now pledges Him for blessing with the widow'.<sup>107</sup> And we can hardly miss the confidence and assurance with which Elijah speaks. The man who had first proved the faithfulness of Jehovah personally at Cherith was fully qualified to quiet the fears and comfort the heart of the poor widow.<sup>108</sup>

Without the promise of verse 14 (riding, as it does, on the back of the Lord's favourite preface, 'Fear not'<sup>109</sup>) that Jehovah, the God of Israel, undertook to replenish and maintain the widows' meagre resources until such time as He sent rain to relieve the drought, Elijah's demand in verse 13 that she should use up what little she had left to make a cake for him 'first' would have been the height of selfishness.<sup>110</sup>

Whereas, backed up by God's explicit promise, Elijah's words were simply a requirement that the widow demonstrate her faith in God's word as the condition of securing His miraculous provision.

## **THE WIDOW'S FAITH**

### **(i) Faith demonstrated**

**Verses 15a.** 'And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah'.

Certainly, unless, with Abraham of old, the widow had been 'fully persuaded that, what' God 'had promised, He was able also to perform',<sup>111</sup> she would never have exhausted her very last supplies as the prophet asked. Without that trust in God's word, she would never have parted with what she could now see to obtain what she could not yet see.

But for this woman (as for all), 'faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'.<sup>112</sup> Surely, without such faith she might well have responded in the words which the Lord Jesus spoke to another mother from that very same area almost nine hundred years later, 'Let the children be filled first,<sup>113</sup> for it is not right to take the children's bread ...'.<sup>114</sup>

In effect, Elijah asks the widow to put God's interests (represented by himself, the prophet of Jehovah) before her own as the condition for her blessing.

'Seek first God's kingdom', Elijah was saying in effect, 'and all these things shall be added to you'.<sup>115</sup> And, when she ventured her very last means of support upon her trust in Jehovah, her meagre resources were more than 'added to' her ... they were multiplied to her! It could well be said of this widow that, having received 'a prophet in the name of a prophet', she received 'a prophet's reward'.<sup>116</sup>

### **(ii) Faith rewarded**

**Verses 15b-16a.** 'And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail'.<sup>117</sup>

And to this widow, every new day<sup>118</sup> would be a fresh – indeed, an exciting – evidence of God's faithfulness to His promise. His compassions didn't fail; they were new every morning.<sup>119</sup> And every

morning (before dipping down into the jar and the cruse, both of which she knew she had completely emptied the day before), she would be able to pray (with a depth of feeling and meaning I cannot), 'Give us this day our daily bread',<sup>120</sup> with *absolute confidence* that the living God of Elijah *could*, and *would*, do just that.

For the remainder of the three and a half years of drought,<sup>121</sup> the sky would be cloudless. Famine, barrenness and suffering would reduce Ba'al's country to a wasteland. But this small family at Zarephath would fare no worse out of a small flour jar and an oil cruse than if they had owned a *thousand corn-fields* and their *own private oil well*. It could truly be said of them as David had once written of the upright in Israel, 'in the days of famine they shall be satisfied'.<sup>122</sup>

The Lord saw fit to meet the widow's need, not by providing her at one time with a store sufficient for several years – or even for several months – but by providing for that need on a daily basis.<sup>123</sup> Had He miraculously supplied her with many jars full of meal and countless vessels full of oil, news of the existence of such a reserve might soon have spread around the famished city and, likely as not, she would soon have lost all.<sup>124</sup>

But the Lord makes no mistakes. Praise God, the word 'Oops' isn't to be found in His dictionary! And so, He, the all-wise God, supplied the widow, her son, and His prophet with their 'daily bread'.

## ROUND 2 TO JEHOVAH!

**Verse 16b.** 'According to the word of the Lord which he spake by Elijah'.

And in so doing, I say it again, Jehovah displays His power in *providing Ba'al's chief commodities* to sustain a widow and her son from *among 'Ba'al's own people'* and that in *the heart of 'Ba'al's own country'*. No question then. If the dry brook at Cherith in verse 7 declared, 'Round 1 to Jehovah!' then the well-fed family at Zarephath in verse 16 proclaimed, 'Round 2 to Jehovah!'

'Seconds out, round three' occupies verses 17-24 of chapter 17. There we see how the Lord puts a further dent in the reputation of 'high and mighty Ba'al', giving additional proof that He, Jehovah, and He alone, is the true and living God. But the exposition of that passage is for Part 3 of our study.

To be continued

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from A. W. Pink, '*Elijah*', page 41.

<sup>2</sup> A point made by A. W. Pink, *loc. cit.*.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ravens normally seek a home territory that is desolate and uninhabited', G. F. Howe, '*The Raven Speaks*', accessed at <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1969/JASA3-69Howe.html>.

<sup>4</sup> 'He ... rained down manna on them to eat', Psa. 78. 24.

<sup>5</sup> 'And it came to pass in the evening, that quails came up, and covered the camp', Exod. 16. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Exod. 16. 1-7, 31; Num. 11. 31-32; Psa. 105. 40.

<sup>7</sup> 'Birds of prey are raptor birds, who are primarily carnivorous and are famed for their incredible hunting skills.

Raptor birds usually have long sharp talons and curved hooked beaks to capture, tear, and rip into their prey.

Ravens, on the other hand, do not depend entirely upon meat as their primary food source', '*The Birds World*', accessed at <https://thebirdsworld.com/are-ravens-birds-of-prey/>.

<sup>8</sup> 'Ravens are scavengers and inhabit mountainous and wild hill country', Lorraine G. d'Agincourt, '*The Canadian Encyclopedia*', Volume III, page 1829, article 'Raven'.

<sup>9</sup> A point made by A. W. Pink, *ibid.*, page 42.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Sam. 15. 29; cf. Num. 23. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Tit. 1. 2; cf. Heb. 6. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 7. 9, 16.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Sam. 6. 10-12.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Kings 13. 21-28.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Kings 2. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Dan 6. 12, 16, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Jon 1. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 17. 27.

<sup>19</sup> With an eye, of course, to Matt. 8. 9; Luke 7. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Lev. 11. 15; Deut. 14. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Josh. 1. 16.

<sup>22</sup> A point made by A. W. Pink, *ibid.*, page 39.

<sup>23</sup> This is the first of three occasions when Elijah was fed miraculously; here by ravens, later, by a widow, 1 Kings 17. 9, 15) and, later again, by an angel, 1 Kings 19. 5-8).

<sup>24</sup> 1 Kings 19. 5-8.

<sup>25</sup> Matt. 4. 11.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Kings 18. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Exod. 16. 12; cf. verse 8.

<sup>28</sup> 'It is partially a carrion [the flesh of animals killed by other predators] feeder, if offal or bodies are fresh; it also eats the young of other birds and very small animals', Gene Stratton-Porter, '*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*', article 'Raven'.

'They feed on carrion ... small mammals ... even the undigested parts of animal faeces', '*Avibirds*', article 'Ravens', accessed at <https://avibirds.com/raven/>.

<sup>29</sup> Exod. 16. 12.

- <sup>30</sup> Job 38. 41.
- <sup>31</sup> Psa. 147. 9.
- <sup>32</sup> Luke 12. 24.
- <sup>33</sup> Thomas Constable, '*Expository Notes on the Bible*', comments on 1 Kings 17. 1-7.
- <sup>34</sup> F. W. Krummacher, '*Elijah the Tishbite*', 1836, page 24.
- <sup>35</sup> It would most definitely have enhanced it.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Both parents feed the young by regurgitating food and water stored in a throat pouch', '*Denali Education Center*', article 'Ravens'. See further:  
 (i) 'The young remain in the nest several weeks before they are able to fly, fed at first on the half digested food disgorged by the parents', '*Encyclopedia Americana*', Volume 23, page 232.  
 (ii) 'Raven nestlings cry for food ... to their parents ... who ... feed their own young', A. Parmelee, '*All The Birds of The Bible*', page 226.  
 (iii) 'Young fledge at 35 to 42 days, and are fed by both parents', '*Raven*', Wikipedia.  
 (iv) 'Our ravens of today are, to all intents, the same birds as those of Palestine in the time of Moses, and ours follow the young afield for several days and feed them until the cawing, flapping youngsters appear larger than the parents', Gene Stratton-Porter, '*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*', article 'Raven'.
- <sup>37</sup> Gen. 8. 6-9
- <sup>38</sup> In obedience to God's 'command', 1 Kings 17. 4, the ravens proved good and faithful servants to Elijah.
- <sup>39</sup> F. B. Meyer, '*Elijah and the Secret of his Power*', pages 21-22.
- <sup>40</sup> Hebrew, 'hâyâh'; the ESV ignores the word.
- <sup>41</sup> 1 Kings 17. 10.
- <sup>42</sup> James 5. 17.
- <sup>43</sup> 1 Kings 17. 1.
- <sup>44</sup> Elijah was not immune from the effects of the drought.
- <sup>45</sup> 'The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; *He never fails*', Zeph. 3. 5.
- <sup>46</sup> 1 Kings 17. 1.
- <sup>47</sup> 'If God lives, what matter if the brook dries. God is greater than all the mercies He bestows. Mercies may be withdrawn, but God remains', Hamilton Smith, '*Elijah: A Prophet of the Lord*', page 16.
- <sup>48</sup> Exod. 17. 6; Num. 20. 11.
- <sup>49</sup> Judg. 15. 18, 19.
- <sup>50</sup> 'Eastward', 1 Kings 17. 3.
- <sup>51</sup> Zarephath lay about 7-8 miles south of Sidon and 13 miles north of Tyre.

<sup>52</sup> 'The captives of this host of the children of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites *as far as Zarephath*', Obad. 20, where the prophet clearly regarded Zarephath as something of an extremity to the north.

More to the point, our Lord referred to Elijah's being 'sent' to Zarephath in His first recorded address in His home synagogue of Nazareth: 'many widows were *in Israel* in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; *but* unto none of them was Elias sent, save *unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon*', Luke 4. 25-26, where our Lord pointed to this as an early instance of God's favour spilling over beyond Israel to the Gentiles. In doing so Jehovah 'was bypassing Israel; in conferring His favour on this gentile He was removing it from Israel. Elijah's journey to Zarephath, therefore, was an act of judgment upon Israel', Dale Ralph Davis, '*The Wisdom and the Folly*', page 214.

The Lord's 'main point is that non-Jews were the ones to accept two of the major signs prophets of the Old Testament. Sidon and Syria were among the particularly despised areas ... Jesus' point: Nazareth will not receive Him, but non-Jews will'. Craig S. Keener, '*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*', page 191.

<sup>53</sup> 'It was a far cry from Cherith to Zarephath, right across the kingdom of Ahab; and to run for refuge to a dependency of Zidon, Jezebel's country, looked like putting his head in the lion's mouth', A. Maclaren, '*Sermons on 1 & 2 Kings*', comments on 1 Kings 17. 1-16, 'The Prophet and the Widow'.

<sup>54</sup> 2 Chron. 15. 9.

<sup>55</sup> 2 Chron. 17. 3, 6.

<sup>56</sup> 'Jehoshaphat came into connection by marriage with Ahab through his son Joram taking Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab, to wife (2 Chron. 21. 6); an event which did not take place on the visit made by Jehoshaphat to Ahab in his palace at Samaria, and recorded in 2 Chron. 18. 2, but which had preceded that by about nine years. That visit falls in the beginning of the year in which Ahab was mortally wounded at Ramoth, and died, i.e., the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat's reign', C. E. Keil, '*Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch*', Volume III, page 376.

<sup>57</sup> 1 Kings 18. 10.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Kings 17. 9.

<sup>59</sup> 'The dependence of Sarepta on Sidon is indicated in the inscriptions of Sennacherib, where it is mentioned as belonging to Luliya (Elulæus), king of Sidon', George Rawlinson, '*The Speaker's Commentary*', Volume 2, page 586.

<sup>60</sup> 1 Kings 16. 31.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Kings 18. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Matthew Henry, '*Commentary on the Whole Bible*', comment on 1 Kings 17. 8-16.

<sup>63</sup> Psa. 78. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Psa. 23. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Rev. 2. 13. 'Emperor worship was prominent in Pergamum. The city was a leader in this form of worship, which was relatively new to the province of Asia ... This form of heathenism best explains the strong terminology regarding the presence of the evil one here, where the imperial cult had its headquarters ... A temple erected to the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma stood in the city', R. L. Thomas, '*Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*', page 184.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Kings 17. 4, 9.

<sup>67</sup> A. Maclaren, *ibid.*, 'The Prophet and the Ravens'.

<sup>68</sup> John Gray, *I and II Kings*, page 380. The childless widow could appeal to the levirate law of Deut. 5. 5-10; cf. Matt. 22. 24.

<sup>69</sup> W. W. Fereday, '*Elijah the Tishbite*', page 47.

'And, if to a widow, why not rather to one of the thousands of widows in Israel?', J. Kitto, '*Daily illustrations: Solomon and the Kings*', pages 219-220. But Jesus pointed out in the Nazareth synagogue that 'Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow', Luke 4. 26; see Note 52 above.

<sup>70</sup> 1 Kings 17. 5.

<sup>71</sup> 'Opening, entrance' – as 19. 13 of cave – not the normal word for a gate.

<sup>72</sup> Gen. 24. 15.

<sup>73</sup> Ruth 2. 3-4.

<sup>74</sup> 2 Sam. 15. 31-32.

<sup>75</sup> Acts 10. 17.

<sup>76</sup> Psa. 31. 15; 'the vicissitudes of human life', F. Delitzsch, *'Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch'*, Volume V, page 389.

<sup>77</sup> 1 Kings 17. 24. 'The stories that call the main character "man of God" ... do seem to emphasise powerful actions, beyond the ability of ordinary people', J. M. Hadley, *'Elijah and Elisha'*, (New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis), volume 4, page 573.

<sup>78</sup> Luke 9. 30-31.

<sup>79</sup> 1 Kings 17. 10.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Kings 17. 4.

<sup>81</sup> By way of example, consider (i) the words of Peter to the crowd in Solomon's Porch, 'I know that you acted in *ignorance*, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He thus *fulfilled*', Acts 3. 17-18, and (ii) the words of Paul in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, 'those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize Him *nor understand* the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, *fulfilled* them by condemning Him', Acts 13. 27.

See further (i) the words of Peter's prayer, 'in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place', Acts 4. 27-28, and (ii) the words of Joseph to his brothers, 'Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life', Gen. 45. 5, and 'As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today', Gen. 50. 20.

<sup>82</sup> See the second stanza at [https://hymnary.org/text/he\\_giveth\\_more\\_grace\\_as\\_our\\_burdens](https://hymnary.org/text/he_giveth_more_grace_as_our_burdens).

<sup>83</sup> Compare its use in Exod. 5. 7, 12.

<sup>84</sup> Numb. 15. 32-36.

<sup>85</sup> Acts 28. 2-3.

<sup>86</sup> It was hardly an encouraging sign.

<sup>87</sup> Gen. 24. 14-18.

<sup>88</sup> 'Be courteous', 1 Pet. 3. 8 KJV.

<sup>89</sup> It is clear that the water supply of Phoenicia had not entirely failed. "The fresh streams of Lebanon would retain their life-giving power long after the scantier springs of Palestine had been dried up", Stanley.

<sup>90</sup> Perhaps, as King Ahaziah later, by his leather girdle and garment of coarse camel's hair or goat's hair, 2 Kings 1. 7-8; cf. Matt. 3. 4; Heb. 11. 37. 'She recognized Elijah, perhaps by his Jewish face, *probably by his prophetic dress* ... as a worshipper of Jehovah', J. Hammond, *'1 Kings: The Pulpit Commentary'*, page 385.

We read elsewhere of 'garments of widowhood' (Gen. 38. 14, 19). In all probability, the prophet and the widow recognised what the other was by their clothing.

<sup>91</sup> The widow's words ('*your* God') do not deny a personal belief in Jehovah any more than they do on the lips of Obadiah (1 Kings 18. 10; cf. 2 Sam. 14. 11) but the widow's background argues strongly that she had no such faith at this point.

<sup>92</sup> She who was to sustain his life is herself ready to die. But he knows whom he has believed!. He knows that "God will not suffer his word to fail, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips" (Psa. 89. 34).

<sup>93</sup> 2 Tim. 1. 12.

<sup>94</sup> Joshua 19. 24, 28.

<sup>95</sup> Deut. 33. 24. 'He shall have such plenty of oil that he may not only wash his face, but his feet also in it', John Wesley, *'Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible'*, comments on Deut. 33. 24.

<sup>96</sup> See J. J. Blunt, *'Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings both of the Old and New Testament'*, pages 188-189.

<sup>97</sup> In marked contrast to the comment of verse 7, 'there was no rain *in the land*'; 'in the land', that is, of Israel.

<sup>98</sup> The regions of Tyre and Sidon had an average annual rainfall of 30-35 inches, compared to the Jordan Valley with its mere 10-15 inches; source: the *'Mean Annual Rainfall'* table in the *'Oxford Bible Atlas'*, Fourth Edition, page 30.

<sup>99</sup> 'Menander mentions this drought in his account of the acts of Ethbaal, king of the Tyrians; where he says thus: "Under him there was a want of rain from the month Hyperberetmus till the month Hyperberetmus of the year following; but when he made supplications, there came great thunders ...". By these words he designed the want of rain that was in the days of Ahab, for at that time it was that Ethbaal also reigned over the Tyrians, as Menander informs us', Flavius Josephus, *'The Antiquities of the Jews'*, Book VIII, Chapter 13, Paragraph 2.

<sup>100</sup> For 'Dagan', see J. H. Walton, *'Guide'*, (New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis), volume 1, page 163. The comments there disassociate 'Dagon' from being 'portrayed in the form of a fish'. 'Dagan was the Hebrew and Ugaritic common noun for "grain" ... according to texts found at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), he was the father of the god Ba'al', *'Britannica Online'*, accessed at ... <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dagan>.

<sup>101</sup> A. S. Kapelrud, *'Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts'*, page 96, and A. R. W. Green, *'The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East'*, page 175.

<sup>102</sup> 'A source (of blessing) to the earth was the rain of Baal and to the field(s) the rain of the Most High; a delight to the earth was the rain of Baal and to the field(s) the rain of the Most High, a delight to the wheat in the furrow, (to) the spelt in the tilth.... The ploughmen did lift up (their) head(s), they that prepared the corn (did lift up their heads) on high; for the bread had failed (in) their bins, the wine had failed in their skins, the oil had failed in their (cruses)', *'The Legend of Kirtu'*, cited by Robert B. Chisholm, Jr in *'The Polemic against Baalism in Israel's Early History and Literature'*, Bibliotheca Sacra, Volume 151 #603, page 270. .

<sup>103</sup> 'In Ugaritic, the term *rkb 'rpt* means "charioteer of the clouds"', J. W. Jones, *'Who Maketh the Clouds His Chariot'*, page 58.

<sup>104</sup> Note the 'loaded' preface to Elijah's announcement in verse 14 – 'Thus says *Jehovah*, the God of *Israel*' – as God's servant delivers another broadside to high and mighty Ba'al.

<sup>105</sup> Wheat is a type of corn, from which flour is made.

<sup>106</sup> Deut. 7. 12-13; 11. 13-14.

<sup>107</sup> W. W. Fereday, *'ibid.'*, page 50.

<sup>108</sup> Compare the words of Paul: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... who encourages us in all our affliction, *that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction whatever, through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged of God*', 2 Cor. 1. 3-4, a cross-reference suggested by A. W. Pink, *'ibid.'*, page 71..

<sup>109</sup> See Dale Ralph Davis, *'ibid.'*, page 216.

<sup>110</sup> I note that both the words 'first' and 'after' are emphatic by position in the Hebrew text.

<sup>111</sup> Rom. 4. 21. Contrast the negative response of Nabal, 'Shall I take my bread and my water ... and give it to men who come from I do not know where?', 1 Sam. 25. 11.

<sup>112</sup> Heb. 11. 1.

<sup>113</sup> The Greek word, 'πρώτος', being the same word as in the Greek Old Testament of 1 Kings 17. 13.

<sup>114</sup> I refer, of course, to our Lord's words to the woman from, of all places, 'the region of Tyre and Sidon ... a Syro-Phoenician by birth', Mark 7. 24-26.

<sup>115</sup> Matt. 6. 33.

<sup>116</sup> Matt. 10. 41. It has been suggested that, when our Lord spoke in the following verse about the 'reward' to be bestowed for giving 'a cup of cold water', He 'may have had this incident in his mind', J. Hammond, *ibid.*, page 386, comment on 1 Kings 17. 16.

<sup>117</sup> This is the first recorded supernatural multiplication of food; cf. 2 Kings 4. 42-44; Matt. 14. 15-21; 15. 32-38.

<sup>118</sup> The supply lasted for 'many days', possibly indicating a year. 'There is no word for "many" ... The Hebrews used "days" for a long time. Thus, the same word is rendered ... in Num. 9. 22 "a year", i.e., the complete round of days. The margin of A.V. has "a full year" in the present verse', J. R. Lumby, '*The First Book of Kings*', Cambridge Bible, page 183.

<sup>119</sup> Lam. 3. 22-23.

<sup>120</sup> Matt. 6. 11. 'There would be sufficient for each day but no store for the morrow', Hamilton Smith, *ibid.*, page 23.

<sup>121</sup> Luke 4. 25; James 5. 17.

<sup>122</sup> Psa. 37.19.

<sup>123</sup> 'It is not as though there were suddenly twenty-five bags of meal slouching against the wall of the widow's kitchen. Instead it was a quiet daily drama of the jar and the jug ... Every morning was a fresh episode of the faithfulness of (the Lord) to His promise. He had not said, "the jar of meal will overflow", but only that it "will never come to an end"', Dale Ralph Davis, *ibid.*, pages 216-217.

<sup>124</sup> 'Why did not God give her a granary full of meal at once, and a vat full of oil? ... How much of it would have been left by the next day? I question whether any would have remained, for in days of famine men are sharp of scent, and it would soon have been noised about the city, "The old widow woman who lives in such-and-such a street, has a great store of food". Why, they would have caused a riot, and robbed the house, and perhaps, have killed the woman and her son. She would have been despoiled of her treasure, and in four and twenty hours the barrel of meal would have been as empty as it was at first, and the cruse of oil would have been spilled upon the ground', C. H. Spurgeon, '*The Inexhaustible Barrel*', sermon preached on 18 December 1859, New Park Street Pulpit, Volume 6, Sermon 290.