

1st Kings 17:1-7

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." 2 The word of the LORD came to him, saying, 3 "Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 4 You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." 5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD; he went and lived by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi. 7 But after a while the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

Baal was a mythological storm god that was thought to bring life giving rain. When a drought occurred and all of the vegetation died, it was commonly thought that Baal had the power needed. The prophet Elijah was the first great biblical miracle worker since Moses and began prophecy 72 years after kingdom divided. He is located in Israel, the northern portion of the divided kingdom. He is also the first pre-exile prophet. The time frame is during the reign of Ahab, the 7th king of Israel since it separated from Judea. He did more to displease God than any king before him. He married Jezebel due to a political alliance between his father King Omri and Phoenicia. After he killed many of the Lords prophets Elijah informs the king that Israel will suffer an extended drought. Elijah knows that he has to steer Israel from the disaster that awaits them as a consequence of national transgression and failure to repent. Elijah knows that the common belief that Baal will bring rain is an illusion. Elijah knows God and that trust needs to be in the one true Lord. To prove it God decreed a three year drought.

A wadi is a river valley that is dry except after a rain. Elijah was a brave man that followed God's instructions in the face of mortal danger. He went to the king that had murdered his colleagues and told him news that the king does not want to hear. The god you are putting your confidence in is fake and powerless. The Lord is the one true God and is going to prove it through some very serious suffering. Afterwards, Elijah knew that he had to flee for his life. God instructed Elijah to go east of the Jordan River to hide. The Ravens brought him morning bread and evening meat. He drank from the wadi and when the famine arrived it verifies that the God of Elijah is the one true God and Baal, the fertility and nature god of the Canaanites, is a false god.

The Bible is full of conflict because it always addresses the disparity between the will of God and a wayward humanity. The conflict between Elijah and Ahab is a conflict between the God of Israel and the god of Canaan. The word of God through Elijah challenges the transgression of Ahab and the people, and it demonstrates God's power. It is the power of God that proves Israel is in the hands of the one true God. Ahab's mistake started when he married the Phoenician princess Jezebel, built a temple for Baal, and erected a shrine in honor of Asherah, a mythical goddess. Ahab's transgression resulted in the immediate appearance of Elijah with a declaration of war against Baal. The tense conflict is resolved by God. Each change of scene is a result of divine order full of important lessons of the necessity to remain loyal, faithful, and devoted to the one true God. Elijah knew God and remained obedient to God and trusted God while confronting his own mortality.

Though God denied rain to an apostate Israel the time frame was a period of divine intervention. There is an era of great prophecy in the Bible that takes place before the exile, during the exile, and after the exile. Elijah is the first of the great prophets of the exile. Divine intervention was necessary because the whole of God's people failed to abide in the covenant and failed to repent when called out on it. I think it is very important to try to understand when and how God intervenes with humanity. I say try because we will never agree entirely on interpretation. Divine intervention is subject to interpretation. Some people believe what others teach them as the gospel. Some are skewed towards transcendence and some are skewed towards immanence. I disagree with taking the word of someone else as the gospel; such conscripted doctrine goes against the very nature of the Lord. Jesus is all about the love of God which eliminates conscripted doctrine. I insist that we are to believe what the Bible teaches and follow Jesus by focusing on the life that he lived and the lessons that he taught.

Jesus Christ himself is a matter of divine intervention. What we see in the Bible is God intervening by blessing and punishing the biblical leaders and the nation as a whole. To assume that God is favoring you over someone else's loss is more of a matter of you failing the test of temptation. To blame God when bad things happen without considering the legitimacy of the interpretation is ignorance of the love of God. I met a man that denied God because his wife died. The extent of God's love is that God allowed God's very own son to die for us and people get angry at God because a loved one died. Well, that is a failure to embrace the love of God. There is one thing that is absolutely guaranteed in life – everyone dies – regardless of faith. To the other extreme, there are people that praise God but do not live by the teachings of Jesus. This is hypocrisy – the thing that Jesus condemned most.

The prophet is guided from saving his own life to the privilege of saving others. By saving the life of the widow and her son, he is also saving their faith. The life of Jesus is very similar to the life of the prophets. They spoke the word of God and got persecuted for it. The least we could do is honor their sacrifices and follow their instructions. The Lord saves us. That in itself is enough motivation to find it a privilege to serve others and help save others. I once had a man introduce me as "This is the preacher that saved me." I said "No, Jesus saved you; I am just one of his agents." The Lord's work is done by those that know God, not just know about God, but to take the time to reflect and study to know the loving character of God and know what God wants of us.