

June 27-July 3, 2022

1 Kings 17–19

“IF THE LORD BE GOD, FOLLOW HIM”

Summary: *1 Kings 17. Elijah seals the heavens and is fed by the ravens—At his command the barrel of flour and the jar of oil of the widow of Zarephath never become empty—He raises her son from death.*

1 Kings 18. Elijah is sent to meet Ahab—Obadiah saves a hundred prophets and meets Elijah—Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to call down fire from heaven—They fail—He calls down fire, slays the prophets of Baal, and opens the heavens for rain.

1 Kings 19. Jezebel seeks the life of Elijah—An angel sends him to Horeb—The Lord speaks to Elijah, not in the wind nor the earthquake nor the fire, but in a still, small voice—Elisha joins Elijah.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How is rain a metaphor of blessings?

The connection of rain and life is expressed in Jewish prayers, and it also includes a subtle (still small voice), recurring inference to the Messiah. “. . . benediction also praises God for His power, or *gevurah*. Among the manifestations of God’s power are His providing sustenance for all living creatures, His healing the sick, and His causing rain to fall. Stress is laid on the revival of the dead, and the benediction which concludes with *Barukh mehayyeh ha-metim* (“Blessed be . . . He Who revives the dead”) is therefore also known as *Tehiyyat ha-Metim* (“Resurrection of the Dead”). “Bountiful rain in season is a blessing and its absence is regarded as a punishment from God. Dew, the nightly condensation of vapor is also emphasized as a symbol of beneficence since it is a source of water for plant life during the dry season. Its absence is also considered to be drought.” “Prayers for rain are found among the earliest liturgies. In the time of the Second Temple, the high priest recited a prayer for rain on the Day of Atonement. During periods of drought special prayers and fasting were

ordained. The prayers for rain and dew in the daily *Amidah* (afternoon prayers) evolved from these practices. Today the principal prayers for rain are recited during the *musaf* service on the eighth day of *Sukkot*, and a benediction (“Who causes wind to blow and rain to fall”) is recited in the *Amidah* daily thereafter until Passover, when the rainy season comes to an end. The special prayers for dew are chanted during the *musaf* service on the first day of Passover and the benediction for dew is substituted thereafter in the daily *Amidah* until *Sukkot*. From about the fifth or sixth of December until Passover the *Amidah* also includes a benediction for both rain and dew.” “There are two seasons in Israel: winter—the cold, rainy season from about October to April, and summer—the hot, dry season when rain is virtually non-existent. “Because Passover falls around the beginning of spring, and because in *Erez* (land) Israel the rainy season ends approximately at the time, a special prayer for dew (*tal*) is recited on the first day and the prayer for rain (*morid ha-geshem*) is suspended.” “In biblical Hebrew, *tal*, the word for dew, may also mean a light rain. A comparison of biblical and *talmudic* quotations and the contemporary rainfall tables of Israel’s

meteorologists shows that the ancient records were accurate observations of weather phenomena. Rains fall in most of Israel from late October to May; and except for dew, the other months are dry. The amount of rain is also variable, so that crop irrigation has been developed to supplement the rainfall and to extend the growing season.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) In Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, the rainfall is equivalent to London, the capital of England, although Israel gets its rain all at once! An annual average of twenty-six inches of rain falls in Israel during the months of December, January and February. (Utah gets about thirteen inches per year.) Rain is a powerful Biblical metaphor emphasizing reward and punishment: “In the Bible, reward and punishment—whether individual, national or universal— is described as appertaining to this world. It is recognized as axiomatic that God rewards the righteous by granting them prosperity and well-being and punishes the wicked with destruction. This forms the basis of the passage from Deuteronomy which constitutes the second paragraph of the *Shema* (**Deuteronomy 6:4-14**) adherence to God’s commandments will bring “the rain in its seasons”; disobedience will cause God “to shut up the heavens that there be no rain, and the land will not yield her fruit.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How did Elijah use his “sealing-powers” to teach?

In response to the faithlessness of Israel, the “sealing” prophet, Elijah, used his God-given authority to seal the heavens. The physical phenomenon of drought and losing their crops reflected the spiritual phenomenon of disregarding the “still small voice” and thereby losing their eternal families. “The prophets attacked idol worship not only on the grounds that it violates God’s covenant with Israel, but

also because it was useless. While the pagans believed that the natural phenomena rain, fertility, health etc. were controlled by idols, the prophets taught that God is in control of nature.” “A special chair is set aside for Elijah at circumcisions, as he is called the protector of children, and the upholder of the covenant between God and Israel, and Elijah is supposed to visit every Jewish home on Passover, so a special cup of wine is set aside for him. And, says the *Midrash*, when the time is right, it will be Elijah who will herald the coming of the Messiah.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

Was Elijah fed by “Ravens” or “Arabs?”

It may be interesting to consider that the word ‘ravens’ in ancient Hebrew can also mean Arabs. Since ancient Hebrew had no vowels, the spelling of both is virtually the same. It still keeps the sacred message the same. The prophet is fed by God through miraculous means (ravens or Arabs)! “On the basis of the unclean birds mentioned in the Bible, the rabbis of the Talmud compiled a list of 24 birds which are forbidden, among them birds of prey such as the vulture, raven, eagle and hawk.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) The name of *Elijah* literally means “my God is *Yah* (Jehovah),” an appropriate name at a time when a proliferation of gods was popular in the land. *Ba’al* in Hebrew means ‘master’. The *Ba’al* religion named gods (masters) of such things as rain, earth, wind and fire. It is interesting that a modern “rock group” choose to call themselves, “Earth, Wind and Fire.” In modern times, groups like these become the popular idols that seek to master the attention of people. The religion popularized at the time of Elijah was. As mentioned in the previous lessons, the priests of *Ba’al* entertained the people by creating theatrics in which they would fight

against evil, fail, and then be rescued by a beautiful unmarried woman. This, of course, drew attention away from the need for personal repentance that God required of his people. Turning to God required self-mastery, in Hebrew "*Ba'al Tshuvah*." "Repentance in Hebrew is known as *teshuvah*, which literally means "return," and signifies a return to God. A person who repents his sins is known as a *ba'al teshuvah*. Many rabbis of the *Talmud* believed that the real *ba'al teshuvah* is greater even than a person who has never sinned and they furthermore said that when a person repents out of love of God (and not just out of fear of divine punishment), all the sins he had committed are considered to be *mitzvot* (commandments and blessings)." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

How important is caring for the widows?

Taking care of the widows is also a high Jewish *mitzvah* (commandment – blessing) Yet Elijah, who could have blessed the widows in Israel, went to *Sarepta (Zarephath)* a suburb of *Sidon (Zidon)* and blessed the "foreign" widow there. "One of the most frequently mentioned *mitzvot* (commandments, blessings) in the *Torah* is to protect the widow, the convert (the Hebrew word *ger* also means stranger) and the orphan who, like the converts, has no parents. This is because these people are alone in the world they are entering and need help in adjusting to new ways of acting and thinking." "The earliest ethical teachings are commandments in the Bible: to do justice, to avoid bribery, gossip, robbery, oppression, to protect the weak—the widow, the orphan, the slave, the stranger; to be kind to animals. Man is obliged to overcome his normal feelings and to obey these commands—even with

respect to his enemy." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

What do I learn from the "drama of miracles" contrasted to the "still small voice?"

The fifteen known miracles at the hands of God through Elijah were always connected to the "still small voice." "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: "And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." (*1 Kings 19:11-12*) "Twenty-seven hundred years later we have had restored to us the means by which we can hear the voice of the Lord . . . It will come, as to Elijah, in a "still small voice . . . to the member of the Church intent on keeping the commandments, needing personal guidance in his daily affairs, pleading for the life of his wife or his child who is desperately ill, the Lord has indicated many times that the answer will come by the "still small voice." How may I, then, know how to receive and what to expect? . . . It is important that we learn to understand when the Lord speaks to us through his Spirit, for it is certain he will do this to the righteous and deserving . . . The word of the Lord comes into the mind . . . Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground." (*Doctrine and Covenants 8:2-3*) "Behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore,

you shall feel that it is right. (Doctrine and Covenants 9:8)” (Elder S. Dilworth Young of the First Council of the Seventy <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1976/04/the-still-small-voice?lang=eng>) “In turbulent times, there is an almost overwhelming temptation for religious leaders to be confrontational. Not only must truth be proclaimed but falsehood must be denounced. Choices must be set out as stark divisions. Not to condemn is to condone. The rabbi who condemned the *conversos* (forced to convert from Judaism) had faith in his heart, logic on his side and Elijah as his

precedent. But the *Midrash* (Talmudic interpretation) and *Maimonides* (Jewish scholar, 1138-1204) set before us another model. A prophet hears not one imperative but two: guidance and compassion, a love of truth and an abiding solidarity with those for whom that truth has become eclipsed. To preserve tradition and at the same time defend those others condemn is the difficult, necessary task of religious leadership in an unreligious age.”

(<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/pinchas/elijah-and-the-still-small-voice/>)