

# The Drought

## *I Kings 17:1-7*

Charles Dickens began his famous novel with these words, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair . . .”

Those words well describe Israel’s around 875 BC.

### **“It was the best of times”**

Economically, Israel flourishes.

Militarily, Israel stands in power.

Politically, Israel enjoys stability.

It was the spring of hope for this people!

### **“It was the worst of times.”**

Spiritually, Israel is pressing into apostasy. The nation not only neglects the LORD, but **openly hates Him**. They tear down Yahweh’s altars. They hunt down and kill the Lord’s prophets. Never in Israel’s history did God’s covenant people so flagrantly and violently oppose Him. **It was the season of Darkness.**

In such a dark time, the LORD raises up an ordinary man to bring light to a rebellious nation and to an idolatrous king. **This man’s name is Elijah.**

For the next several months we are going to study Elijah’s life. We have given the title: “Faithful Living in Faltering Times.”

Other than Moses, no person in the OT is referenced more times in the NT than Elijah. Elijah grows up in the region east of the Jordan River in Gilead. Gilead is a rugged country filled with **dry hills and shaggy forests**. Elijah

wears a scratchy cloak made of camel hair with a leather belt. Nothing about him is sophisticated or refined.

James calls him *a “man with a nature like ours.”* In other words, we was a man of strength and a man of weakness. A man of courage and a man of fear. A man of faith and a man of doubt. Yet the LORD appoints him to call a nation to repentance.

Elijah’s mission is to bring God’s Word to a people who did not want to hear it. His mission is to confront a king and queen who murder godly people. His mission is to contend against the prophets of Baal and to advance the name of the LORD in a day when God’s name is despised.

Please open your Bibles to I Kings 17 this morning as we begin our series in the life of Elijah.

**Main Idea: The LORD is jealous for His name and is faithful to His servants.**

**Three Faithful Actions of God in a Faltering World**

**Action #1: God contends against false religion.**

**Action #2: God commissions His servants.**

**Action #3: God cares for His servants.**

**Three Actions of God in a Faltering World**

**Action #1: God contends against false religion.**

This world is a spiritual war zone and God is not sitting out on the fight. If we ask the question, “What does the life of Elijah teach us about God?” One answer will be . . .

**Truth: God is a God who actively contends for His honor and for His people. God often allows His enemies to win some of the battles, but only for the greater purpose of displaying His glory.**

In order to understand the story of Elijah we have to understand the context of his times. Please put your **Old Testament history glasses** on this morning as we briefly recall the history of the nation for Israel from King Saul’s day to Elijah’s.

**I know that this may be hard to follow along, but try to catch the flow of the events leading up to Elijah's calling.**

In 1043 BC, King Saul begins his reign as the first king over Israel. After Saul's demise, King David reigns and after David comes his son, Solomon. Solomon starts well, but **falters toward the end** of his 40 year reign.

Solomon sins by marrying a total of 700 wives. That is a lot of **wedding cake!** Solomon's wives have a strong negative spiritual influence on Solomon.

*For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. (1Ki 11:4 ESV)*

Solomon builds worship centers for these other gods in Israel and the LORD is not pleased.

In 931 BC, King Solomon dies **and** Solomon's son Rehoboam takes the throne, and shortly after a civil war is incited by a man named Jeroboam. **The nation now divides into two parts.** Ten of the 12 tribes of Israel form the northern kingdom under Jeroboam. Two of the 12 tribes of Israel form the southern kingdom under Rehoboam.

From this time forward in the biblical record, the northern kingdom is going to be called "Israel" and the southern kingdom is going to be called "Judah". **If you miss this distinction, you will become very confused as you read through I and II Kings and the OT prophets.**

**Judah and Israel are not the same country anymore.** They are two separate countries through the rest of the OT. Elijah prophesies to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, realizes that it is politically dangerous for the citizens of his new nation to travel into Judah to worship God in temple in Jerusalem. **So Jeroboam makes two golden calves and sets one in Bethel and one in Dan so that Israel could worship God without going to the temple in Jerusalem.**

At this point, Jeroboam's intention is to worship the true God using **forbidden means.**

Remember the second commandment that God had given Moses:

*"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, (Exo 20:4-5 ESV)*

**The LORD knows that our hearts are prone to make worship about us and our feelings and not about HIM and His glory.** So God sets limitations upon our worship of Him. These limitations are REALLY important to Him. The LORD cares HOW we worship Him.

**Truth: When we ignore God's Word and make worship of God about what we want or need, we are on the path toward idolatry.**

After Jeroboam dies Nadab takes the throne. After two years, Baasha murders Nadab and takes the throne. Baasha is succeeded by his drunken murdering son, Elah. Zimri kills Elah and slaughters all the household of Baasha to gain the throne.

**Zimri lasts seven days** as king before he commits suicide and Omri is made king. Here is how the Bible describes Omri: <sup>2</sup>

*Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did more evil than all who were before him . . . provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols. (1Ki 16:25-26 ESV)*

Exciting start to the northern kingdom of Israel! **Seven kings in the first 58 years and all of them were wicked rulers.** Perhaps now there will be a change for the good after the most evil Omri dies? No.

*And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him.*

(Ahab likely marries Jezebel for political gain. The Sidonians ruled the seas and were a very wealthy nation. **Now** "Ethbaal" means "Baal is alive!" Jezebel is a zealous missionary for Baal.)

*He (Ahab) erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. . . Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. (1Ki 16:30-33 ESV)*

**Ahab officially changes the national religion of Israel from the worship of Yahweh to the worship of Baal.**

Once in power, Jezebel outlaws the worship of Yahweh and **systematically kills the prophets Yahweh. To speak up on behalf of Yahweh in this culture was an invitation to persecution and possibly death.**

She financially supports 450 Baal priests out of her own purse and convinces Ahab to build a huge temple in Samaria dedicated to Baal.

**You might be asking, “Who is Baal?” Baal is the storm god who was said to have power over the rain, the winds and the weather.** Remember that this is an agricultural society. **Baal worshippers claimed that if Baal is not pleased, then he would not send any rain! On the other hand, if Baal is happy, then rain will fall in abundance.**

IN these “worst of times” God raises up the prophet Elijah to contend against Baal for Him.

**Truth: God is never passive in regard to the honor of His Name.**

*Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4:23–24 [ESV](#))*

To the people living in Elijah’s day, it likely seemed that God does not care much when His Name is trampled underfoot and dishonored. The LORD is allowing two Baal worshippers to rule as king and queen. The LORD is allowing temples and places of Baal worship to be built and to succeed. The LORD is allowing His own prophets to be killed. This has been going on for SO LONG!

It would have been tempting to conclude that maybe the LORD is not alive or if He is alive that He does is not bothered by false religion. As we will see, that conclusion is far far far from the truth.

**Truth: God is patient with us in our sin and our idolatry. He desires for everyone to have time to repent of their sin and receive His mercy. But the LORD will surely fulfill His promises of judgment.**

*1 Kings 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab,*

After decades of patience, God now contends against his beloved nation Israel by raising up a prophet named Elijah. Elijah will be used of the LORD to speak truth and to bring judgment upon a people who had forgotten the LORD.

Question: Do you think that God is in the business of contending against false religion in our day?

*"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (Matthew 10:34–36 [ESV](#))*

By this Jesus teaches that God is not in the business of compromising or making alliances with false gods. **When a person decides to follow Jesus, we will immediately be drawn into a fight against the false gods that people around us worship.** We must prepare ourselves to be hated for declaring that "Jesus is LORD. And there is NO OTHER GOD besides Him."

The war is real. Keep in mind the nature of our battle:

*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (2 Corinthians 10:3–5 [ESV](#))*

Two applications to the context of Elijah's life:

1. **Be ready to resist expedience in our worship of God.** Satan loves to attack God's people at the heart of worship. **He twists worship to make it about us and not about the LORD. He clouds our hearts so that we evaluate our worship on the basis of how it makes us feel and not about how it exalts God.** The problem in Israel is not that the churches are empty. The problem is that the churches are full of false worship.
2. **Be ready to oppose the gods of this world or they will conquer our hearts.** False gods are very alluring. If we allow our culture to determine what we believe to be true about

God and how we live, we ultimately lose the LORD as our God.  
**Be careful of this world's influence on your heart!**

**Action #1: God contends against false religion.**

**Action #2: God commissions His servants.**

*ESV 1 Kings 17:1 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." (1Ki 17:1 ESV)*

God responds to the gross idolatry of this nation by sending to this nation a man as His prophet. The LORD loves to use frail and ordinary people to do His supernatural work.

**Often the LORD raises up a young person. I pray that the LORD might raise up a young man from our own church family who will revive the church through bold, faithful proclamation of God's truth.**

**Circle the name "Elijah". Back in those days, people paid attention to the meaning of names.**

**Elijah's name means, "The LORD (Yahweh) is God." "Elijah" is a dangerous name to give a son in these dark days of Baal worship.** His name confronts the deity whom everyone is following. Everyone in this culture accepted idea that Baal is God.

**If you wore a shirt to school with Elijah's name printed on the front, you would be sent home for offensive speech.** The name "Elijah" is a poke in the eye to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Remember that Ahab and Jezebel control all the news outlets, all the political speech, all the social media messaging. And 24/7 their message is "Baal is God. 3X" Enter a guy whose name is "Elijah" . . . "The LORD is God." When Elijah's name is spoken, everyone gets quiet. "Did he just say what I thought he said?"

**The issue in Israel here is the same issue that confronts America and confronts you and me personally.** Who is your God? Who is going to rule your life? Will it be the god of sensuality or the God of righteousness? Will it be the god fashioned by human imagination or the God who wrote the Bible? Will it be the god of self or the God of scripture?

Now a **prophet is a man set apart by God primarily to serve as God's agent of revelation.** The prophet is the one whom God puts His word into their mouth and the prophet faithfully speaks it.

More than the prophet predicting future event, the prophet is one who tells the people of his own generation God's truth. **The prophet does not stand before the king or the nation and say, "This is my humble opinion."** Or "I think we should consider this." **Rather he says, "Thus saith the Lord."** The prophet speaks boldly and clearly because he is speaking as it were the very words of God Himself.

God's prophet will speak God truth about sin and judgment regardless of the consequences. **So ordinary Elijah is sent by God to the most powerful man in all Israel to speak a message that is going to outrage Him.** Let us look at verse one again:

*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." (1Ki 17:1 ESV)*

Notice that Elijah identifies WHO sent him. He says, "The Lord, **the God Israel, . . .**" **Elijah reminds Ahab that God had a special covenant relationship with Israel.** The LORD set His love upon this people before they were a people. He was their Ruler, their Sovereign, their King, their Savior.

And then Elijah says to King Ahab, *"Yahweh is not dead as you and the prophets of Baal suggest. No. He has been patient with our nation so as not to destroy her with His hand, but His patience is not weakness. The Lord God is alive and He is going to show you that Baal is impotent before Him.*

*You say that Baal is the storm god who controls the rain. **You say that unless we worship Baal, rain will not fall.** Well, you may have noticed that it has not rained for six months now and people are getting nervous. I am here to bring you this news from the Lord. It will not rain at all for the next three years. Yes. You heard me correctly. It will not rain a drop in your kingdom for the next three years. **Ahab, the Lord God is the one who provides life for His people.** And this nation needs to repent of idolatry and acknowledge Him."*



**So what do you think? Ahab pleased or offended?** Of course, Ahab is furious at the message that Elijah communicates to him.

**PRINCIPLE: God message often offends sinful man. Obedience to God often provokes hatred toward God's servants.**

If you are a follower of Jesus, I believe that God commissions you just as He does Elijah to speak His truth to His church and to His world.

**Three applications we draw from Elijah's calling:**

1. **Be bold in speaking God's truth.** Make sure that you know what God's message is. Study the Bible to know it. Be careful that you do not make pronouncements on the basis of your emotions or your feelings. Of course, **we speak hard words with soft, loving hearts.** We are not joyful about God's judgment on anyone. We wish for all to come to repentance and be saved. But we must not soften the Gospel message.

God's truth offers grace that can rescue a soul from eternal death. **If Ahab had only listened and believed Elijah's message, he and the nation would have been spared the drought to come.**

2. **Prepare to stand alone with God.** At this point in the story, Elijah is not aware of anyone else in Israel who is taking a stand for the LORD. Yet he stands with the LORD and the LORD stands with him.

Some sing the song, "These are the days of Elijah." I fear that the song may be right, but not for the reasons that the song gives.

These are the days of Elijah . . . idolatry is filling the country and the churches.

These are the days of Elijah . . . sexual immorality is the norm.

These are the days of Elijah . . . political leaders and those in power threaten anyone who follows the LORD.

These are the days of Elijah . . . few in that few are standing with the LORD.

But **I know that we often have to stand all alone.** Please remember that God stands with you. And if God is for us, against us, who can be?? God does not abandon those who take a stand for Him. We will see that next week as we study what God did for Elijah at the brook Cherith.

### 3. Pray before you speak.

1 Kings does not tell us of Elijah's praying in this story. But James does.

<sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. (Jam 5:17-18 ESV)

Elijah's effectiveness was the result of a deep, personal communion with God through prayer. Elijah's praying was not formal and cold, but passionate and personal. What is the state of your personal walk with Jesus?

**Samuel Chadwick writes,** *"The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless works and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."*

Elijah received spiritual strength to serve God through his praying. That is where we will find strength as well. Are you weary or discouraged in service to God? Let us pray! **We cannot do anything without Him and we do not need to try!**

### Action #3: God cares for His servants.

*And the word of the LORD came to him: 3 "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 4 You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.""* (1 Kings 17:2-4 [ESV](#))

No one serving the LORD will ever lack God's supply.

God asked Elijah to walk by faith, not by sight. If we are to be used as an instrument in God's hand, we must be willing to feel the tension between what God says and what our own hearts and minds say.

Had Elijah ever seen ravens feed anyone? No. Ravens were scavenger birds who raided kills that were not theirs. They were an unclean bird that picked at bones of dead animals. When you approached a raven, the bird would fly away in fear. **How could they of all creatures feed a man in the wilderness? God said, “Trust me, Elijah”**

*So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. (1Ki 17:5 ESV)*

*And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. (1Ki 17:6 ESV)*

Notice that obedience came before God’s provision. **We must obey** if we are to anticipate God’s providing hand.

**Truth: We need never fear a lack of provision when we are obedient to God’s commandments.**

**Satan loves to tempt us to disobey God by inducing fear. He whispers, “If you obey God, then disaster will overcome you.”** That disaster might be emotional, relational, financial or physical. **But Satan loves to convince us that obedience to God is too costly and that it makes good sense not to obey.** But friends, **God will move heaven and earth to supply our need if that is His chosen method.**

God told the ravens to bring Elijah bread and meat every morning and every evening. I do not want to give the impression that Elijah was eating **gourmet meals and Perrier water**. No, he was eating strips of meat from dead animals and bits of bread born by the beaks of ravens. He was drinking out of a tiny trickling brook in a desert. Not a deep, clear mountain spring.

It may sometimes seem as though God’s provision is barely enough. God does not promise us luxury, but He promises to supply our need.

Here is the promise that God makes to His servants:

*And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Phi 4:19-20 ESV)*

**These promises are given to us to embolden us to obey God's voice!  
Elijah was willing to do whatever God asked of him. How about you?**

CONCLUSION:

**Main Idea: The LORD is jealous for His name and is faithful to His servants.** GOSPEL HERE. Elijah called Ahab to choose. Yahweh or Baal. You?

Does God still contend against false religion?

*Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." (Revelation 19:11–16 [ESV](#))*