

Speaking Truth to Power:  
The Prophet Elijah, #1

## “Elijah: My God Is the LORD”

1 Kings 17

--CEFC 1/12/20

(Read 1 Kings 16:29-17:24)

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Before the days of on-demand television,

when you sat down to watch TV you had to engage in

what we called “channel surfing.”

Remember that?

You would flip through the channels

until you came upon something you wanted to watch.

Invariably, at our house Susan would stop the surfing on some dramatic movie,

and I would always object.

“Look,” I’d say, “We can’t just jump into the middle of some movie.

We don’t know what it’s about.”

Now, that’s not true, I might add,

when you jump into the middle of a football game.

Right there on the screen, it tells you what the score is

and where you are in the game.

And every once in a while, they give you a game summary

to catch you up with what’s happened.

But movies aren’t like that.

I am lost if I don't start watching from the beginning.

But I would relent,

only because I have learned

that Susan has this uncanny ability, which I don't share,

to figure out the plot and the characters of a movie,

and within ten minutes she could explain it all to me./

Now, this morning we jumping right into the middle

of a book of the Old Testament called 1 Kings.

and I don't want you to feel like I have felt when channel surfing with my wife,

so I want to begin with a game summary, so to speak—

filling you in on what's happened in this story to bring us to this point.

So as you turn in your Bibles to our passage in 1 Kings 17,

let me try to catch you up.

In the beginning, God created the world,

but the first human beings refused to trust God and obey him,

so sin entered the world and spread, making a mess of things.

But God in his grace and mercy,

revealed himself to a man named Abraham

and promised that he would bless him,

and make of him a great nation,

and through that nation

all the nations of the earth would be blessed.



But this story of Israel is a sad story—

for the people quickly forsake the LORD and go after these other gods.

And the LORD brings judgement upon them;

as foreign nations attack and rule over them.

They cry out to God in their bondage,

and he raises up military leaders, called judges, to rescue them.

But this cycle of idolatry, punishment, repentance, and rescue goes on and on.

Finally, the people say, we want a king like all the other nations,

in effect, rejecting the LORD as their king.

The LORD agrees to their request

and gives them Saul, and then David, and then Solomon.

Solomon seems to be such a wise king,

and in dedicating the temple in Jerusalem,

he even prays that the people of Israel would live in such a way

that **“all the peoples of the earth may know**

**that the LORD is God and that there is no other.”** (1 Kings 8:60).

But you remember what happens—

Solomon marries foreign women—lots of them—

and they bring their gods with them,

and all Israel is defiled by this false worship.

Solomon’s unfaithfulness to the LORD

leads to the division of the kingdom—between the north,

which retains the name Israel,  
and the south, which becomes known as Judah.

Each of these separate kingdoms has their own kings,  
and the two Old Testament books of Kings  
tell the story of these two kingdoms  
and their various kings.

The narrator of the books of Kings tells us that only a few of the kings of Judah  
were any good,  
and that all of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were bad—  
they were bad because from the beginning they ignored the law of Moses  
about where and how the LORD should be worshipped;  
they made up their own rules.

The seven kings of Israel who followed Solomon were a sorry lot.

Jeroboam was an idolator,

Nadab then followed in his father's footsteps.

He was murdered by Baasha.

Elah, Baasha's son, was a drunkard.

Zimri was really bad: he murdered Elah and all of Baasha's family.

But he only lasted seven days and committed suicide

when Omri laid siege to his city.

And this Omri, we're told,

"did more evil than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:25).

But Ahab--he was the worst of all, which was no small accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ryken, p. 434.

As we read earlier--

16:30--**“Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD  
than any of those before him.”**

The sins of his forebears were trivial compared to his.

He made a political alliance with the pagan Sidonians

by marrying their king’s daughter, the wicked Queen Jezebel.

Ahab and Jezebel become “the Bonnie and Clyde of the Old Testament.”<sup>2</sup>

And this matrimonial/political alliance

resulted in a religious alliance with Jezebel’s god Baal.

We’re told that Ahab “**set up an altar for Baal**

**in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria.”**

(and such Baal worship often included temple prostitution

and the sacrificial killing of babies.)

**Ahab also made an Asherah pole**

[the symbol of the goddess Asharah]

**and he did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel,**

**than did all the kings of Israel before him.”**

He aroused the anger of “**the LORD [Yahweh], the God of Israel**”—

let that phrase sink in.

It is critical to the story.

What a mess!

Ahab was a corrupt king who ruled over a corrupt kingdom.

Our writer in 1 Kings gives evidence of that corruption

by mentioning Hiel of Bethel who rebuilt Jericho.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

He did this in defiance of Joshua's solemn oath  
condemning the family of anyone  
who attempted such an enterprise.  
Hiel rebuilt Jericho, and it cost him his sons,  
just as the Word of the Lord spoken by Joshua had declared./

So that's where we stand;

that's the game summary:

Things are really bad in Israel when we jump into the story in 1 Kings 17.

Israel was called to show the world that Yahweh, the LORD, was God  
and there was no other.

But that was not happening.

Israel had become just like all the other nations,  
and God's plan of blessing seemed thwarted.

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Then we read in 1 Kings 17:1—

**"Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab,  
"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve,  
there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."**

No, you haven't missed anything.

There's been no previous introduction.

This is the first time this man Elijah has been mentioned.

We are led to wonder—

Who is this man who suddenly appears with no background,  
no credentials, no CV,  
and who dares to stand before the king  
to announce this message of misery?

And devastating it would be—

A drought in that part of the world was not just an inconvenience.

It would mean more than a temporary economic downturn.

Neither dew nor rain for years would certainly mean danger and death to many.

Who is this man?

This chapter will show him to be **the LORD's Prophet—**

**a man of the God whose word is true.**

And his name says it all—

Elijah—it comes in two forms in Hebrew<sup>3</sup>--

one means, "**The LORD (Yahweh) is God.**"

and the other means "**My God is the LORD**"

If you don't remember anything else I say this morning, remember this—

Elijah means "**The LORD is God.**"

and "**My God is the LORD**"

The LORD, Yahweh, is God.

He is the God of Israel

and he is the living God,

the true God,

the God who acts powerfully in the world.

And Elijah declares that the LORD is his God.

He is the God “**I serve,**” Elijah says—

or literally, he is the God “**before whom I stand.**”<sup>4</sup>

And because I stand before this God

I can stand before you, O king, and declare to you

that “**there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years**

**except at my word.**” /

As we saw last week,

James, in the New Testament, says that Elijah “prayed earnestly

**that it would not rain**” (5:17).

Now whether that refers to some previous prayer of Elijah

or James considers this pronouncement a kind of prayer,

these words spoken by Elijah express the will of God.

They are spoken by one who “**stands before God.**”

And what is the significance of these words?

What’s this message about?

Our writer has just mentioned the punishment that came upon Hiel

fulfilling the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua.

So here these words are fulfilling the word of the LORD spoken by Moses.

Back in Deuteronomy, Moses had warned the people

<sup>4</sup> wyŶÎnDpVI yI;tvd∞AmDo r∞RvSa < IEaðrVc^y y§EhøITa

as they were about to enter into the promised land:

**“Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away**

**and worship other gods and bow down to them.**

Then the LORD’s anger will burn against you,

and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain

and the ground will yield no produce,

and you will soon perish

from the good land the LORD is giving you” (Deut. 11:16,17).

In praying that it would not rain

Elijah was simply praying for God to fulfill his promise—

Elijah desires to see God’s name to be treated as holy

and for his kingdom to come, his will to be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Elijah longed to see God’s honor to be restored in Israel,

and if that took God’s judgment to accomplish that,

then so be it.

**“there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years**

**except at my word,”** he says to King Ahab.

Elijah was speaking truth to power.

God’s judgment is coming upon this wicked king,

affecting his entire kingdom.

“My God is the LORD, King Ahab.

Who is your God?”

You must decide, O king, if you want to avert a horrible calamity.

And Ahab's punishment would fit his crime,  
for Baal was considered a fertility god—  
a god who supplied rain for the crops.

"If you think Baal will save you, you are wrong, King Ahab.

My God is the LORD, and he is the living God.  
He, not Baal, is the God of Israel,  
and He, not Baal, controls the rain,  
and you need to learn that.

**There will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."**

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We are given no response from King Ahab,  
He disappears from the story until the next chapter.  
Instead, the focus in our passage is on the Lord's dealing with Elijah.

First, Elijah receives a word from the Lord,  
confirming his role as a prophet.

That word of the Lord comes in the form of a command:

**"Go, hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan."**

Since only by the word of Elijah could there be rain,  
his seclusion, in effect, cut off Israel from any reprieve.

We'll see next week how desperate Ahab is to find him.

There would be a drought not only of rain  
but also of the Word of God.

The LORD gives Elijah a command;  
then the LORD speaks a word of promise:

If Elijah obeyed the command

he would receive this promise:

**“there you will drink from the brook**

**and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.”**

In faith, Elijah obeyed this word of God:

**“he went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.”**

And in his faithfulness,

the Lord fulfilled his promise:

v. 6—**“The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning**

**and bread and meat in the evening,**

**and he drank from the brook.”**

It was an unusual arrangement, to say the least.

ravens, as scavengers, were, according to the law, unclean birds.

But they provided Elijah’s needs abundantly.

To enjoy a meal of meat in both the morning and the evening

was almost a feast.

Ham and eggs in the morning,

roast pork at night.

After some time, when the drought had caused the brook to run dry,

Elijah received another word from the Lord—

**“Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there.”**

If the use of ravens was perplexing,

this command would have been considered provocative.

## Go to Zarephath?

Zarephath was a small town belonging to the region of Sidon,  
on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel.

It was this outside the bounds of the kingdom ruled by King Ahab,  
further cutting Elijah off from Ahab's only hope  
of relieving the devastating drought.

But Zarephath of Sidon was also in Jezebel's home region.

This was the very heart of Baal's own territory.

And even on his home turf, Baal was no match for the Lord—  
the drought had devastated that land also.

Israel's God was no territorial deity--  
he was showing himself to be the God of all nations.

Again, this command comes with a promise—  
the promise of provision.

**"I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."**

A widow was, again, a most unlikely source of sustenance,  
but a provocative command and an unexpected promise  
is often how the word of the Lord seems to us.

His ways are not our ways,  
we mustn't forget that.

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The story of Elijah with the widow of Zarephath is heart-wrenching.

This woman seems on the very verge of death herself—  
gathering sticks to make a fire to bake for herself and her son  
a final meal before the famine overtakes them both

and they die.

Elijah calls her to faith in the word of God—

“Don’t be afraid,” he says.

“If you first feed me, then the Lord will feed you.”

Isn’t the kind of test of faith we are sometimes confronted with?

We’re called to give even when we may have a need,

trusting that if we give, the Lord will then supply our need.

Somehow, this pagan woman responds in faith to Elijah’s request—

She recognizes that the LORD, Elijah’s God, lives—

and she acts on the promise of his word.

She reminds us of another Canaanite woman, describes in the Gospels—

She comes to Jesus to heal her demonized daughter;

Jesus rejects her at first,

saying that he has only come to lost sheep of Israel.

“Yes, Lord, she says,

but even the dogs receive the crumbs that fall from the table.”

Jesus commends her great faith,

and her daughter was healed.

Look at v. 15—“[This widow] went away and did as Elijah had told her.

So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry,

in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.”

This widow of Zarephath, this pagan outsider, was blessed.

Jesus referred to this event when he confronted the unbelief

of the Jews in Capernaum—

Luke 4:25-26-- **“In truth I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time,**

**. . . Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them,**

**but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.”**

There is no religious privilege before God—

The Lord’s blessing will go to those who trust in his word,

wherever they may be.

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But the story is not over.

Elijah will once more display the power of God—

this time even over death itself.

v. 17—**“Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill.**

**He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.”**

All seemed well for this widow of Zarephath—

each day the flour appeared and the oil kept flowing.

But then, a parent’s worst nightmare—

her son becomes ill and dies.

Why? we might ask.

Why should this woman who displays such faith

have to experience such suffering?

As one writer put it:

“Yahweh both provides and perplexes;  
he both blesses and bewilders,  
he both delights and devastates.  
he seems to be both faithful and fitful;  
he sustains life and then takes it away.”<sup>5</sup>

What are we to make of him?

In her grief, the widow lashes out at Elijah,  
looking for someone to blame—  
She said to him, **“What do you have against me, man of God?  
Did you come to [bring to remembrance]<sup>6</sup> my sin  
and kill my son?”**

She seems to have some realization of a connection between sin and death—  
she has an awareness of her own moral failure,  
and she sees the death of her son as some sort of punishment,  
and she blames Elijah for bringing her sin to light.

Yes, spiritual leaders can be blamed for all sorts of things!

But rather than defend himself or God,  
Elijah asks to take the boy from his mother’s arms,  
and in the upper room where he was staying,  
he prayed.  
He prayed with a passion that showed  
that he shared in the heartache and the perplexity of this woman--

<sup>5</sup> Davis, pp. 219,220.

<sup>6</sup> This verb in the hiphil always refers to remembrance before God.

v. 20--“O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also  
upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?”  
Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD,  
“O LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”

Is the LORD able to do such a thing?

Up to this point in the Bible there is no instance of anyone  
being raised from the dead.

In the words of one commentator:

“It is one thing to rescue people from the jaws of death,  
but can he do anything when death has clamped tight its jaws  
and swallowed up the victim?”

He can act across the border from Israel in Sidon,  
but is there a ‘border’ that he ultimately *cannot* cross,  
a kingdom in which he has no power?  
when faced by Mot, the Canaanite god of Death,  
must the Lord, like Baal, bow the knee?”<sup>7</sup>

The answer is No!

‘The LORD heard Elijah’s cry,  
and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived.’”

Can you even imagine the joy of that woman  
when Elijah comes down those stairs with that boy in his arms  
and says to her, “**Look, your son is alive!**”

We are reminded of another widow in the Gospels—

<sup>7</sup> Provan, p. 134; cited in Davis, p. 223.

a widow of Nain who had lost her only son,

but who was brought back to life by the word of our Lord Jesus.

And Jesus, too, gave him back to his mother.

What saving power!

What the woman in our story thought she knew is now made certain—

In the climax to this passage, she says to Elijah,

**“Now I know that you are a man of God**

**and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”**

So, in this chapter, we are introduced to Elijah—

a man of God who speaks the word of the LORD—

and that word is true.

While the events of this chapter take place in private,

they prepare us for the very public demonstration to come.

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The story in this passage introduces us to Elijah,

but the real protagonist, the central character,

is not Elijah at all.

In fact, James in the New Testament tells us that Elijah is not all that special.

Elijah is just a man like us, James says.

No, the real hero of this story

is the LORD, Yahweh, Elijah’s God.

Remember:

What does Elijah’s name mean?—**“The LORD is God”**

and “My God is the LORD.”

And Elijah’s confrontation with Ahab

with which this chapter begins, is really a **battle of gods**.

Who is the true God?

Is it Yahweh, the God of Israel,

or is it Baal, the god of the Canaanites?

And Who will be your God?

Will it be Yahweh, the God of Israel,

or is it Baal, the god of the Canaanites?

Two weeks ago, I talked about the most important question you ever have to answer—

it is Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?”

In effect, Jesus assumes that you’ve already answered this question—

Who is the true God?

This is where it all begins.

This chapter gives us a picture of Elijah’s God, God of Israel,

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—

the LORD, Yahweh, who is God and there is no other.

I want you to see four ways that the LORD reveals himself to be the true God

in the events of this passage.

**First, the LORD is revealed as the righteous Judge.**

The people of Israel had once asked the prophet Samuel for a king--

a king like all the other nations,

and that is exactly what they got—

a king like all the other nations.

The kings of the northern kingdom

turned their back on the Lord, the God of Israel,

and sought the favor of the gods of the nations.

Instead of bearing witness to the world that the LORD, Yahweh, is God

and there is no other,

Yahweh was treated as just one god among many.

The LORD was patient with such idolatry,

but his patience would run out,

and Elijah's words to Ahab

announced that ~~that day of judgement~~ from the LORD had come.

**"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve,**

**there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."**

We live in a moral universe.

There is such a thing as good and evil,

right and wrong.

And they matter—they matter eternally.

And we will all be held accountable for our moral choices,

you can be sure of it.

For the LORD is a righteous Judge.

As Paul declared to the Athenians,

**"[The Lord] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice**

**by the man he has appointed.**

**He has given proof of this to everyone**

by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

It’s true, God’s judgment doesn’t always come immediately,  
but it will come inevitably.

We dare not presume upon his patience with us,  
for the Lord sees;  
the Lord knows;  
and the Lord will judge.

Our sins will be brought to remembrance before the LORD,  
and without someone to intercede for us,  
without a mediator, a Savior,  
we will be without hope.

The LORD is the righteous Judge.

Will your god judge so justly?

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Second, in this story **the LORD is revealed the supreme Creator**.

It is not Baal who brings the rains in their seasons;  
it is the LORD;  
and it is in his power to withhold them also.

In his hand are even the mysterious powers of life and death—  
The LORD rules over this world,  
because it is his;

he made it.

He set the stars in place;

he ordained the movement of the sun and the moon,

from the beginning, it was his wisdom

that imprinted his divine design into the universe;

turning chaos into a marvelous cosmos.

it is the Lord who orders his creation

such that scientists discovering the wonderful workings of nature

are simply thinking God's thoughts after him.

And what he has made, he sustains at every moment by his sovereign will.

The LORD is God and there is no other.

And he is Lord over his creation.

Does your god rule this created world?

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Third, in this story **the LORD is revealed as the gracious Provider**.

The same hand that brought manna and quail

to the people of Israel in the desert,

provided bread and meat to Elijah in the Kerith Ravine.

The LORD could order the ravens to feed Elijah there;

just as he could command a widow in Zarephath

to share with Elijah her last handful of flour,

and he could somehow provide each day flour enough for that day.

We don't know how he orders the ravens or commands a widow

who herself seems to be oblivious to any such command,  
for the LORD acts in mysterious ways to provide for his people.

And I suspect that many of you could testify to the Lord's provision in your life,  
sometimes in ways you would never have expected.

He is gracious to the poor and the needy,

to the widow and the fatherless.

So our Lord Jesus calls us to pray for the provision of our heavenly Father,

saying, "Give us this day our daily bread."

For the LORD, the God of Israel, is a gracious Provider.

Will your god provide as abundantly as the Lord?

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And finally, in this story **the LORD is revealed as a powerful Redeemer**.

For the LORD is able to turn back even the forces of death and bring new life.

Where there was despair and hopelessness in the life of this widow

who had lost her only son,  
he brings joy and faith.

Did you notice her transformation?

Back in v. 12 she refers to the LORD as Elijah's God.

But in the end, she confesses her own faith—

**“Now I know that you are a man of God**

**and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”**

It took the experience of tragedy to bring her to that point—

but the LORD redeemed that experience

and in her darkness, he shed his marvelous light.

Doesn't this point us to an even greater act of redeeming power?

Not just of a resuscitation,

but of a resurrection—

when, after the darkness of Good Friday

and three days in a tomb,

the LORD, the God of Israel,

raised Jesus his Son from the grave.

The LORD is a God of redeeming power.

He can overcome and overrule and reverse the course of events

and turn defeat into victory,

tragedy into joy,

death into life.

Jesus is risen—death has been defeated.

There is nothing the LORD cannot do

to redeem his people from the depths of despair.

Don't forget that.

The LORD is a powerful Redeemer.

Can your god bring life from death?

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Elijah confronts King Ahab—

His name says it all—“The LORD is God” and “My God is the LORD”

“Who is your god, O king?”

That is the question that will dominate our journey

through the exploits of this prophet of God.

And it is a question that is addressed to us—

Who or what is your god?

You see, your god is whoever or whatever you look to

to give you security in life.

Your god is whatever you think will bring you happiness and satisfaction.

It’s what you call on when you’re in trouble and need help.

It’s what you think of as the highest good

and most worthy of praise

Your god is that which you dare not neglect or offend,

lest it turn its power against you,

so you are willing to make sacrifices to it,

seeking to manipulate its power to your benefit.

Everyone has their god—

I like how David Foster Wallace put it

in his now famous 2005 commencement address at Kenyon College—

“in the day-to-day trenches of adult life,  
there is actually no such thing as atheism.

There is no such thing as not worshipping.

Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.”

What will it be—

power, money, beauty, the quest for romantic love,  
scientific knowledge, the latest technology,  
some political tribe or social cause—  
maybe it will be your own desires, your own intellect,  
your own wisdom,  
your own ability to figure everything out?

What will it be?

Who or what is your god?

Elijah confronts us all with this one truth—

**The LORD, Elijah’s God, the God of Israel—**

**He is the living God who acts.**

**He is the Righteous Judge**

**the Supreme Creator**

**the Gracious Provider**

**the Powerful Redeemer.**

**he is God and there is no other.**

He is the God who has now revealed himself

as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is he your God?

He must be,  
for there is no other.

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Prayer

Closing Song: *King Forevermore*

Benediction:

1Tim. 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God,  
be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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Speaking Truth to Power:

The Prophet Elijah, #1

Jan. 12, 2020

## Elijah: “My God Is the LORD”

(1 Kings 17)

Times were bad in Israel. A people with a calling to display to the nations the glory of the LORD had turned to worship Baal. But the LORD is not without a witness, and a mysterious prophet suddenly appears to speak truth to power. Our passage introduces us to Elijah, but more importantly, it shows us Elijah’s God.

### I. Elijah, the LORD’s Prophet—

a man of God whose word is true.

### II. The LORD, Elijah’s God—

the living God who acts.

#### A. The Righteous Judge

#### B. The Supreme Creator

C. The Gracious Provider

D. The Powerful Redeemer

*Who/What is your God?*

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Sermon Response:

**“Elijah: My God Is the LORD”**  
**(1 Kings 17)**

- What do we learn from the quick survey of the history of Israel up to the point at which we pick up the story in 1 Kings 17?
- What could give Elijah the courage to speak truth to power as he confronts King Ahab?
- What do you make of the common pattern in which God gives a command followed by a promise? Have you ever had that kind of experience in your relationship with God—in which you must first obey in faith before you can receive the blessing of a promise?
- What are the rivals to God in our world today? What are the rivals to God in your own life?
- Is the LORD, the God of Israel and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ your God? What evidence is there of that fact in your life?