

## Elijah Confronts Ahab: The Power of Prayer

### 1 Kings 17:1

1 Kings 17:1 – *“And Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”*

#### Background Notes

Elijah was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. He was not a “writing prophet,” like Isaiah or Jeremiah, who wrote books of Scripture. Elijah lived before the time of the “writing prophets.” As a spokesman for God, Elijah came on the scene when wicked King Ahab was on the throne in the northern kingdom of Israel.

1 Kings 17:1 says that Elijah was from Tishba in Gilead. We don't know the location of the town of Tishba, but Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan River, where the nation of Jordan is located today

Elijah burst onto the political scene as an unknown. Ahab probably had never seen or even heard of Elijah before the confrontation in verse 1. Remember, Ahab was the wicked king of the northern kingdom of Israel, who had opened the door for worship of the pagan god, Baal. As we discussed in 1 Kings 16, Ahab had done more to “provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger” than all the kings of Israel who came before him!

Now, seemingly out of nowhere, this unknown prophet appeared dramatically at the palace in the capital city of Samaria. Elijah dressed austerely – in a garment of camel's hair and a big leather belt (2 Kings 1). But don't get the idea that Elijah was a simple “country bumpkin.” No! He was more like John the Baptist in the way he suddenly burst into the palace scene, confronted Ahab, and gave a short powerful message.

Elijah the prophet confronted wicked King Ahab with a message that was short and to the point: *“As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”* He gave the message and then disappeared from the scene! (He'll be back in a couple of years but Ahab didn't know that at this point.)

Can you imagine Ahab's startled reaction to this intrusion? “Who is this man? Where did he come from? Who let him in? How dare he say there won't be dew or rain except at *his* word?” But Elijah was gone before Ahab and Jezebel could arrest him, and he was nowhere to be found. God hid Elijah for almost three years.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The secret of public power is private prayer.

Elijah announced: *“There shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”*

How could Elijah claim such power? One answer is that he was making the claim in God’s name, not in his own name. *“As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”*

But that’s not the whole answer. Turn to James 5:16. There we read, *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”*

Now that’s the full answer. Elijah was a great “pray-er.” He prayed earnestly and fervently. The secret of public power is private prayer.

1 Kings 18:1 says that Elijah returned to Ahab three years after confronting him the first time. James 5:17 says that the drought lasted three years and six months. That means that Elijah had already

been praying for at least six months before he confronted Ahab for the first time. No wonder there was power associated with Elijah’s claim! The secret of public power is private prayer.

This is certainly true today. Before any ministry for the Lord is powerful and effective, there has been lots of private prayer. The power of any ministry you’re involved in is not only dependent on your hard work. It’s dependent on your prayers! The secret of public power is private prayer.

### 2. God answers prayer that is in line with His Word.

Where do you think Elijah got this idea to pray that the Lord would stop the rain? Do you think he came up with that idea himself? “I know what I’ll do to make Ahab stop his wicked ways. I’m going to pray that it won’t rain for a couple of years.” No. God answered his prayer because Elijah was praying **in line with the revealed word of God**. That’s why God answered. In the Law He gave to Israel, God said: If you obey me and follow me, I will bless you and I will bless your land. But if you reject me and disobey me, and no long walk in my ways, I will not bless you and I will not bless your land. I will stop the rain!

Read about this in Deuteronomy 11, or Deuteronomy 28, or Leviticus 26. Here’s what the Lord told His people through Moses in Deuteronomy 11, right before the Jewish people conquered the land of Canaan. Beginning with verse 11: *“But*

*the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year. 'And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.'* Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you."

So as you can see, Elijah was praying in line with the Word of God. The nation of Israel had departed from the Lord. God had said He would not bless them or their land if they no longer walked in His ways. So Elijah prayed on that basis - and God answered! God always answers prayer that is in line with His word.

Another significant point is that the false pagan deity, Baal, was looked on as the god of fertility, including the fertility of the land. Therefore Baal supposedly controlled the rain. But Elijah, as God's spokesman, was hitting the enemy where it hurt, and his strategy was right in line with God's Word. God answers prayers that are in line with his Word – both then and today.

Do you pray in line with God's Word? Do you pray in line with the promises and principles and commands of Scripture? Do we pray, 'Lord, please bless my life if I obey You and follow You - but I pray that You **won't** bless my life if I disobey You and fail to follow in Your ways'? That's a scriptural prayer! And God will answer that prayer, because God answers prayer that is in line with His Word.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Let's remember that we speak for the living God.

Notice again Elijah's short and to-the-point message: "*As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.*" In essence he said, 'Ahab, you may be the king of Israel, and you may think that I'm just standing here before you, but you've got it wrong. I stand before the God of Israel, not just before the human king of Israel. And the God of Israel is alive, not like this false dead Baal that you worship and serve. I'm **God's representative**. I stand before **Him**. I receive instructions from **Him**. I am **His** spokesman."

We too need to remember that we speak for the living God. Many of the people that you rub shoulders with every day believe that God is dead. No! God is alive, and we stand before Him. We speak for the living God! 2 Corinthians 5:20 says that we are ambassadors for Christ. We represent Him. We speak for Him.

Do you speak for the living God when it comes to denouncing the sin in our society? Do you ever write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on God's behalf, exposing some wrong in your community? Did you ever speak out on your campus on behalf of God, exposing sin and expressing biblical standards? Let's remember that we speak for the living God!

## 2. You could be the next Elijah!

"Are you kidding me? I could be the next Elijah?" Yes! We need more Elijahs!

Look again at James 5:17, "*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.*" What does that mean? It means that Elijah was a normal human being. He was just like us. He wasn't Superman. He didn't walk around with a halo over his head. He faced temptations in life just as we do. Elijah was a man with a human nature like ours, but God used him in a great way. Why? Because he practiced the presence of the living God every day. He walked with God. He talked with God. No wonder Elijah was able to step out and ***boldly speak for God!***

We too can be greatly used by God if we follow the model of Elijah. **You** could be the next Elijah where you live. **You** could be the next Elijah where you work. **You** could be the next Elijah on your college campus. Some of you will be going on to a secular campus soon. **You** could be the next Elijah on that campus. The Lord may call you to step up and speak boldly about all the unbiblical teaching and ungodly activities on that campus.

If you practice the presence of the Lord as Elijah did, and if you pray as Elijah did, **you** could be the next Elijah! **You** could be the next Elijah!