

**Elijah, 1 Kings 17-18. Augusta. October- November 2011. (2) Reading : 1 Kings 17. 1-16.**

As most, if not all, of you know, this week we are looking at the life of Elijah as recorded for us in chapters 17 and 18 of the First Book of Kings.

Our reading for this evening comes from 1 Kings 17 ... verses 1 to 16.

**[Reading : 1 Kings 17. 1-16.]**

I began our study last evening with the claim that, although we rightly regard the incident on Mount Carmel in chapter 18 as the great – the decisive – confrontation between Jehovah and Ba'al, in reality the battle was joined here in chapter 17 ... that it was here that the Lord set about discrediting the claims made for Ba'al by his followers, and demonstrating that He – the Lord – and only He – was the true and living God.

We noted last evening that Elijah's message in verse 1 was in effect a declaration of war – not a declaration of war by Elijah on Jezebel not on Jezebel's husband Ahab – not on Jezebel's father IttoBaal, but a declaration of war by Elijah's God, Jehovah, on Jezebel's god – on Ba'al!

*This evening we pick up the threads at verse 4.*

**Verse 4.** The supply which the Lord provided for Elijah at the brook Cherith was in part *natural* – I refer, of course, to the brook itself, which was so natural a supply that it would dry up in time if there was no rain – and in part *supernatural* – I refer, of course, to the ravens.<sup>1</sup>

I guess that, if God had employed human beings to take Elijah his food, they might have divulged his hiding-place, either deliberately or by accident – and, even if not, they might have been tracked by Ahab's spies. If a dog or some domestic animal had gone out each morning and evening carrying food supplies, people might well have noticed the regular journeys and made investigations. One way or another, Ahab would soon have discovered Elijah's whereabouts. But birds flying with flesh into the desert would arouse no suspicions. If noticed at all, it would be assumed they were carrying food to their young. For ravens are known to roost in desolate rocky areas,<sup>2</sup> similar to the ravine through which the brook Cherith flowed.

So God arranged for provisions to be flown in to Elijah – two flights a day – one in the morning and one in the evening – and all courtesy of the Raven Catering Company.

God *could*, of course, have rained down manna from heaven<sup>3</sup> for Elijah, or brought up quails<sup>4</sup> for him, as He had done for the Israelites in the wilderness.<sup>5</sup> Instead, He chose to feed Elijah through the ravens.

But could 'birds of prey' such as ravens be depended upon? Naturally, far from being providers, they were scavengers.<sup>6</sup> Was it not far more likely then that they would devour the food themselves than bring it to the hungry prophet? Yes, of course it was – but Elijah's trust rested *not* in the natural instinct of the birds, but in the faithful word of Him who does not – and who cannot – lie.<sup>7</sup>

Elijah need have no fear – '*I have commanded the ravens*', the living God had said. And the One who had once directed the right number of each species of living thing into Noah's ark ... the One who had once directed two milch cows to bring back a very different kind of ark out of the land of the Philistines ... the One who had once directed a lion to meet, tear and kill – but not devour – a disobedient prophet ... the One who would one day direct two she bears to deal with a group of mocking youths ... the One who would one day direct hungry lions to leave unharmed His 80-year old servant ... the One who would one day direct a great fish to provide three days' free hospitality for a reluctant preacher ... the One who would one day direct a much smaller fish in the Sea of Galilee to collect a coin of sufficient value to pay the temple tribute for His Son and one of His disciples, and then come in to the shore at the very right moment to connect with Peter's shiny hook ... Such a One would surely have no problem in directing the ravens twice a day to the brook! When He says, 'come', they come – when He says, 'go', they go.

**Verse 5.** He went and did according to the word of the Lord'.

Elijah would have known that, according to God's own law – the law to which Elijah aimed to restore His people – according to that law, the raven was an unclean bird, which the godly Jew was forbidden to eat.<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, Elijah wasn't told to eat the ravens, yet God still chose an unclean bird to feed Elijah. Perhaps to remind him (and us) the He, the Lord is sovereign, and that we each need to submit to whatever methods He uses to supply our needs.

Full marks to Elijah. With my eye on the answer which the representatives of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh gave to Joshua in Joshua chapter 1,<sup>9</sup> He went where the Lord sent him, and he did what the Lord

commanded him. Let us never forget that, in the prayer our Lord taught his disciples to pray, 'Thy will be done' precedes 'Give us this day our daily bread'.

**Verse 6.** The two mercy flights a day arrived as regular as clockwork – with their precious cargo delivered safely on each occasion.

God could, of course, have sent an angel to minister to Elijah, as He would at Beersheba in chapter 19, or have sent several angels to do so, as He would, almost 900 years later, to His Son in another wilderness.<sup>10</sup> But now He chose to send provisions by winged messengers of an altogether different kind, showing us, I guess, that, when He pleases, He can fulfill His will and purpose as easily and as effectively through the *lowliest of creatures* as He can through the *most exalted*. And I like to note that, in the event, Elijah actually fared better than the Lord's other surviving prophets, who, according to verse 4 of chapter 18, were 'fed' by Obadiah – for they had to make do with only 'bread and water', whereas Elijah had meat on his menu.

Indeed, Elijah fared even better than the children of Israel had when God fed them miraculously in the wilderness. According to Exodus 16, the Lord said to Moses, 'At even you shall eat flesh (quails, that is), and in the morning you shall be filled with bread (with manna); and you shall know that I am the Lord your God'.<sup>11</sup> But Elijah enjoyed both bread and meat each morning and each evening.

But I guess the ravens didn't bring Elijah quails to eat. I wonder if Elijah ever asked himself what kind of meat they *did* bring, or where they had found it? It's probably better not to ask, Elijah! Just give thanks for your meal, tuck in, and rejoice in the daily evidence that Jehovah is giving you that He indeed is *God* – and that He is, as Exodus 16 expressed it, 'the Lord *your God*'!

Scripture points out on more than one occasion that, as is true of *all* God's creatures, ravens are fed by God Himself – for example, the Lord asked Job, 'Who provides food for the raven, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?'<sup>12</sup> And the One who Himself faithfully provided the ravens with their *own* food had every right to command them to transport food with equal faithfulness for the benefit of His servant if He (the Lord) so wished.

I have on my computer one modern exposition of 1 Kings 17 in which the commentator makes the claim – and I quote – that 'Ravens do not even feed their own young'.<sup>13</sup> Nor is this idea anything new. A much earlier commentator – writing over 170 years ago – wrote that ravens, 'voracious and unfeeling ... would leave their own young to starve'.<sup>14</sup> If this was true, it would certainly add another dimension to the miracle of verse 6!

But, alas for those who find the idea attractive, it *isn't* true! Indeed, the authorities tell us, *both* parent ravens feed their young – and, the authorities add by way of explanation, they do this 'by regurgitating food and water stored in a throat pouch'.<sup>15</sup> But I was pleased, for Elijah's sake, to note that the text of verse 6, if anything, suggests that the bread and meat brought by the ravens to Cherith was still just *that* – bread and meat – doing service as food for the first time.

And I can tell you that Elijah's ravens certainly did a lot more for *him* than Noah's raven ever did for *him* when he sent it out from the ark to establish whether or not the waters of the flood had receded. You may remember that Noah's raven didn't bring *him* so much as one olive leaf<sup>16</sup> – whereas Elijah's ravens dutifully brought him bread and flesh every morning and every evening.<sup>17</sup>

And even today, there are occasions when the Lord uses the most unlikely and unusual of means to supply the needs of His people. For my part, I enjoy the story recounted by F B Meyer, a Bible expositor of a bygone day: 'A little German boy, having read about this incident with his widowed mother on a wintry night, as they sat in a fireless room beside a bare table, asked her if he might open the door for God's ravens to come in – for he was sure that they must be on their way. The burgomaster (the 'mayor') of the town, passing by, and attracted by the sight of the open door, entered and enquired the cause. When he learnt the reason, he said, 'I will be God's ravens'; and relieved their need both then and afterwards'. And happy incidents of this kind have been multiplied a thousand times over – through the wonderful workings of a God who is so good at doing things like that.

'And it came to pass that the brook dried up' says verse 7.<sup>18</sup> Needless to say, the *miraculous food* supply *didn't* fail – Elijah's black-coated waiters turned up for duty each mealtime as directed. But the *water* supply *wasn't* miraculous – any more than would be the water supply later in Zarephath, of which we read in verses 10 and 11.

Although this was the very brook to which the Lord had steered Elijah, the fact that in time it ran dry was no great trial to Elijah's faith. Indeed the very opposite. For Elijah knew full well what *we* are told in verse 6 – that it dried up 'because there was no rain in the land'. And why was that, pray? Because *he* had *prayed* that there *might be no rain* – and because his word to King Ahab was being fulfilled.<sup>19</sup> And so the *failing* of the waters of the brook was as much the fulfilment of God's word *through* His servant in verse 1 – as the *unfailing* visits of the ravens were the fulfilment of God's word *to* His servant in verse 4. Let me say that again ... the *failing* of the waters of the brook was as much the fulfilment of God's word *through* Elijah in verse 1, as the *unfailing* visits of the ravens were the

fulfilment of God's word *to* him in verse 4. Let me say that again ... the *failing* of the waters of the brook was as much the fulfilment of God's word *through* Elijah in verse 1, as the *unfailing* visits of the ravens were the fulfilment of God's word *to* him in verse 4.

Last evening, we imagined Elijah saying to Jezebel through his declaration of verse 1, 'Since your Ba'al is the supposed provider of rain and since Jehovah announces that He is going to withhold it, the gauntlet is down. The contest has well and truly begun. It is very much a case of seconds out, round one'. And the dry brook at Cherith in verse 7 declared loudly, 'Round 1 to Jehovah!' Round 2 will take us from verse 8 to verse 16.

The waters of the brook may fail, but the Lord *never* does.<sup>20</sup> And if, as Elijah announced in verse 1, His God *lived*, what did it matter if the brook ran dry? But how slow *we* are to learn that God is greater than any number of the mercies He bestows. Sometimes He sees fit to withdraw those mercies – sometimes we have to face a brook which dries up – maybe in the form of bereavement, the breakdown of health, a financial difficulty, the loss of employment, or the sudden failure of some other source of supply – perhaps as the Lord's way of teaching us to trust, not in the *blessings*, but in the *Blesser* – teaching us to rest, not in the *gifts*, but in the *Giver*. The big question is, can *we* trust God when *our* brook dries up?

But what next? Now that the *natural* supply of water to which God directed Elijah has failed, will God supply him with his water in a *supernatural* way, as He has his food? We know that He certainly *could* have done that, had He so wished. Had He not, on *more* than one occasion, brought water out of the rock to quench the thirst of an entire nation – as witness both Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 – and had He not brought water out of a split hollow rock at Lehi for Samson's sake in Judges 15?<sup>21</sup> Perhaps then the Lord will brake open the rocks of the ravine at *Cherith* to satisfy *Elijah's* thirst?

But, no – instead, for His own reasons, the Lord gave Elijah his marching orders. And, on the face of it, they were *mighty odd* marching orders! 'Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon'.

According to verse 3, Elijah is currently situated at Cherith by the Jordan in 'the *east*' – whereas Zarephath was situated far off in the north-west – on the Mediterranean Sea coast between Tyre and Sidon.<sup>22</sup>

The town of Zarephath lay way beyond the northern border of Israel as it then was. I note that Obadiah foretold in verse 20 of his prophecy, 'The captives of this host of the children of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as *Zarephath*' – clearly regarding Zarephath as something of *an extremity* to the north.

From Cherith to Zarephath involved a journey of well over 80 miles right across the kingdom of Ahab – over mountain and plain – and that's a *long* way to travel on foot!<sup>23</sup> A lesser man than Elijah might well have objected, 'Why Zarephath, Lord? Why not the southern kingdom of Judah – which is much nearer? As you know, Lord, many of my fellow countrymen left Israel for Judah less than 40 years ago because they saw that you were with the then godly King Asa who ruled there<sup>24</sup> – and now Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, reigns there – who I know has no time personally for Ba'al or Asherah.<sup>25</sup> Why not send me to Judah, Lord – which, apart from being so much nearer geographically – and easier on my feet – is so much more to my spiritual taste?'

But I suppose the Lord could have replied, 'Yes, but are you not aware that it was only a short time ago that this same King Jehoshaphat, in his folly, allied himself with Ahab and Jezebel by taking their daughter Athaliah as wife for his son Joram.<sup>26</sup> And, given that Ahab, having failed to track you down in Israel, is *at this moment* taking oaths of the monarchs of all nations and kingdoms around that they aren't harbouring you,<sup>27</sup> Judah would hardly be the wisest or the safest choice as a place of refuge'.<sup>28</sup>

And yet, even outside of Israel and Judah, any place which 'belonged to' *Sidon* would probably have been the last spot which anyone in Elijah's day would have recommended as a haven for one of *the Lord's* prophets.

And Zarephath was not only situated less than eight miles south of Sidon, but, as indicated on ancient Assyrian inscriptions, was very much dependent upon Sidon, falling as it did within the domain and under the rule of the king of the Sidonians<sup>29</sup> – who we know from the end of chapter 16 to be none other than Ethba'al (IttoBa'al I), the father of Jezebel. Zarephath fell therefore in the very area from which Elijah's deadliest enemy – Jezebel – had come.

And yet, *for these very reasons*, such a location was in reality the safest place of all. For, I guess, the kingdom of IttoBa'al would have been the last place where Ahab would have thought of looking for the man he dubbed 'the troubler of Israel'.<sup>30</sup> There was also a lovely twist to the Lord's choice of Zarephath as a secure refuge for His servant. As has been well said, 'Jezebel was Elijah's greatest enemy; yet, to show her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him in her own country'.<sup>31</sup> That is, the Lord will demonstrate that His prophet, who, thanks to Jezebel, isn't at all safe in *his own country*, will, with *His* (the Lord's) *protective hand over him*, be altogether safe in *hers*!

I suppose it is true to say therefore that, having formerly spread for Elijah at Cherith 'a table in the wilderness',<sup>32</sup> the Lord now spreads for him at Zarephath 'a table in the presence of his enemies'.<sup>33</sup>

But, far more to the point, the land of Sidon formed the heartland of Ba'al's kingdom. Zarephath therefore nestled close by the very source and centre of the Ba'al worship which had recently flooded into Israel!

And so, as a further way of discrediting Ba'al, the Lord deliberately hid His prophet in Ba'al's own backyard. I am reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus to the church at Pergamos, 'I know where you *dwell*, where *Satan's* throne is'.<sup>34</sup> And I note that, according to verse 8, Elijah was sent to '*dwell*' where, in effect, *Ba'al's* throne was.

'Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there', was God's word to Elijah, 'behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain you'. No, Elijah wasn't given the widow's name, address or zip code, nor was he told how he was to distinguish her from other widows. He knew only that, from now on, his provision would come, not courtesy of the birds of the air, but through human hands.

And I note that the very same words are employed about the ravens and the widow: 'I have commanded ... to sustain (to feed) you there'. As one writer expressed it, 'God has ways of reaching the mysterious animal instinct and the mysterious human will, and each, in its own way, obeys'.<sup>35</sup>

From now on, Elijah's provision would come, I say, through human hands. And through the least likely hands he could have imagined. For widows were among the poorest of all people in the ancient world, and could therefore be expected to be among the very first to run out of food in time of drought and famine.<sup>36</sup>

And, as I understand it, a widow with sons or a son – as was the case with the woman God chose to provide for His prophet – was the most vulnerable of all. I have read that, in the Ancient Near East, 'a childless widow was the responsibility of the family, but a widow-mother ... had no such provision'.<sup>37</sup>

But, to a man such as Elijah – God's word was enough. No questions, no arguments, no complaints.<sup>38</sup> According to verse 10, 'he arose and went'.

And although, as we noted, he had been given no means of identifying the chosen 'widow woman' – although he had no appointment fixed – yet, 'when he came to the gate (literally, the entrance<sup>39</sup>) of the city', we read, '*behold*, a widow woman *was there*'.<sup>40</sup> That is, when Elijah eventually completed his 80-plus mile journey, he found the Lord's provision there waiting for him!

'Behold' – 'look', 'ponder'. 'Marvel', the text is shouting out at *us*, 'that, as part and parcel of that providence by which the living God overrules events in all *our lives*, this particular woman should be at the entrance to the city the very moment God's prophet arrived!' – just as when, (i) after Abraham's servant prayed that the Lord would direct him to the young woman the Lord had chosen as wife for Isaac, we read, '*behold*, Rebekah came out',<sup>41</sup> just as when, (ii) after young Ruth chanced to light on a portion of a field belonging to Boaz, we read, '*behold*, Boaz came',<sup>42</sup> and just as (iii) immediately after David asked God to turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness, '*behold*, Hushai the Archite (the man whom God would use to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel) ... '*behold*, Hushai the Archite came to meet him',<sup>43</sup> and, turning to the New Testament, just as when (iv), even as the apostle Peter was questioning what the vision of the sheet from heaven might mean, '*behold*, the men who were sent by Cornelius ... stood at the gate'.<sup>44</sup>

It is wonderful to know that we – and our times – are in good hands ... assured that God's clock always keeps perfect time!

For her part the widow had gone out that morning to gather sticks – not to greet a guest. She thought only about feeding her son and herself with one last cake (the word refers to a cake baked in hot ashes<sup>45</sup>) – with no idea of sustaining a man of God<sup>46</sup> out of her all-but-empty barrel (or jar) of meal.

Little did this woman think that she had been chosen by God to provide board and lodge for one of the two men who would one day appear in glory with the Saviour on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration! She went to the gate that day on an errand – a tragic errand – of her own, to gather a few dry sticks to kindle a fire to cook her last meal. But, unknown to her, this widow was also on an errand from God.

For He, *the Lord*, had assured Elijah that *He* had '*commanded*' a widow to sustain – to *feed* – him *there*, v. 10 – using, as we have noted previously, the very same words (both in Hebrew and Greek) which He had in verse 4, of the ravens, 'I have *commanded* the ravens to *feed* you *there*' – the word '*commanded*' being used in both cases in the sense of 'ordained', 'appointed'. And the fact that the widow was altogether unaware of this arrangement was no more of a problem to Elijah than that the ravens had been unaware of it too! What encouragement it is for us to know that the sovereign Lord often works out His purpose *through those who know nothing of it*.

Not, of course, that the widow would be able to 'sustain' Elijah out of her own resources – she wasn't even able to *sustain herself*. For, in the words of Annie Johnson Flint's great hymn 'He giveth more grace', (number 608 in 'Hymns of Truth and Praise') this desolate and starving woman had now – quite literally – '*reached the end of her hoarded resources*'.

No, she would certainly not be able to 'sustain' Elijah out of her own resources. But then she would not need to. She was to be, in effect, merely the cook! God Himself would provide the necessary ingredients.

When Elijah first saw the widow, she was 'gathering sticks' – the word translated 'gathering' suggesting foraging for discarded stubble.<sup>47</sup> No doubt, the jostling of loads when passing through the entrance to the town made it a likely place to find small pieces of wood which had been dropped.<sup>48</sup>

I can think of only three people in the Bible of whom we read that they gathered sticks. In the first case, recorded in Numbers 15 verses 32 to 36, a man gathered sticks on the Sabbath day in blatant defiance against the known command of God – and paid dearly for his sinfulness. In the last case, recorded in Acts 28 verse 3, it was the apostle Paul who, in the spirit of helpfulness, not to speak of lowliness, gathered a bundle of sticks to feed a fire which had been lit to warm and dry over 270 men recently shipwrecked at Malta. But in the middle case, that of this woman, the gathering of sticks was neither an act of sinfulness nor of helpfulness, but an act of hopelessness.

Before he arrived at Zarephath, Elijah knew only that his future source of supply was to be a *widow*. But now, as evidenced by her search for a little brushwood, he knew it was to be a *poor* widow – a *very poor* widow.<sup>49</sup>

Undismayed, the prophet set out to check that this was *indeed* the widow of whom the Lord had spoken – and this initially by the very same method of identification as had been used by Abraham's servant those many years before – by asking politely for a 'little' drink.<sup>50</sup> I say 'politely' for I note that both men – Abraham's servant and Jehovah's servant – were careful to add their 'I pray you' – their 'please', that is.<sup>51</sup> Both these good men were marked by courtesy – a quality we do well to learn from them.<sup>52</sup>

Elijah's demands were small – but his request for the widow to bring him just a '*morsel*' – a *piece* – of bread, along with a '*little water*',<sup>53</sup> served to expose her heart-rending situation.<sup>54</sup>

The widow immediately recognised Elijah – either as an Israelite – or, more likely, given his distinctive clothing – his leather girdle and garment of coarse camel's hair or goat's hair<sup>55</sup> – as a prophet of Jehovah. And the widow followed the normal practice of the day by expressing her oath in the name of the God of the person to whom she was speaking – in this case, in the name of 'Jehovah your God' – which in itself is interesting given that Jezebel, also originally from the Tyre and Sidon area, had done all she could to replace Jehovah-worship in Israel by Ba'al-worship.

Clearly all this widow's hopes were pinned – not on Elijah's living God – but on her small jar of wheat-flour and her cruse of oil<sup>56</sup> – and, as *they* were failing, there was nothing now left for her, but to prepare her 'last supper' – to cook a funeral meal for herself and her son.<sup>57,58</sup>

And now Elijah knew that not only was the widow to whom he had been sent a very poor widow, but that the one to whom had been sent to sustain his life was herself ready to die. But then, as the apostle Paul much later, he knew whom he had believed!<sup>59</sup>

The widow now has left only the most meager supplies of wheat-flour and oil – which were, I understand, two of the major exports of Phoenicia. In connection with her 'oil', I note that during the division of Canaan among the tribes of Israel in Joshua 19, the district of Sidon fell within the inheritance of *Asher*<sup>60</sup> – and then I note that, when Moses blessed the tribes of Israel in Deuteronomy 33, he specifically said of Asher, 'let him dip his foot in *oil*'<sup>61</sup> – indicating that oil was one of the principal products of the area.<sup>62</sup> An example, perhaps, of what has been called 'The Undesigned Coincidences' of scripture?

The fact that both wheat-flour and oil were now in such desperately short supply proves just how severe the drought was – extending, I note, not only throughout the land of Israel, but also throughout the land of Ba'al. And this is confirmed explicitly by the words of Elijah to the widow in verse 14 – 'the jar of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail (in Zarephath, of course), until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth (on the face of the ground', lit.<sup>63</sup>)' to solve the crisis.

Ba'al's reputation had suffered badly because heaven had been shut up over Israel – over which also – thanks to Jezebel's fanatical crusade – to all intent and purpose, Ba'al now effectively ruled. But no doubt Jezebel was confident that Ba'al still reigned supreme – still retained a firm grip – over his own patch ... that the region of Tyre and Sidon would be unaffected by the drought. After all, the normal annual rainfall there was over double that of the Jordan Valley – including that at Cherith<sup>64</sup>. But *if* that was what 'the wicked queen' expected – she was wrong!

According to Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, the Ephesian writer Menander, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, mentions a year-long drought in the region of Tyre and Sidon around this time, which, *it was claimed*, was brought to an end by the supplications of Jezebel's father, IttoBa'al. Well, whatever truth – or otherwise – lay behind that particular claim, IttoBa'al's prayers clearly weren't accomplishing very much now!<sup>65</sup>

We have no way of knowing how widespread *was* the drought – nor does it matter. What matters is that it certainly stretched to Phoenicia – the stronghold of Ba'al – and thereby discredited all the claims made for him by his worshippers.

But we should note that Ba'al wasn't believed to be the giver of rain *only*. Because he was regarded as the god of storm and rain, he was also believed to be the god of *crops*. One of his many titles was 'the son of Dagan' – Dagon (Dagon in Hebrew) being the great grain god<sup>66</sup> – and, as such, Ba'al was supposed to guarantee agricultural prosperity to his people. It was, their own literature asserted, Ba'al who was 'the Lord of the Ploughed Furrows'.<sup>67</sup> According to one of their legends, 'the source of blessing to the earth was the rain of Ba'al ... a delight to the wheat in the furrow ... The ploughmen lifted up their heads – they that prepared the corn lifted up their heads on high – for the bread had failed in their bins ... the oil had failed in their cruses'.<sup>68</sup> With 1 Kings 17 in front of us, we can hardly miss the significance of '*their bread bins*' and '*their oil cruses*' being empty. But this would only continue, the legend ran, until Ba'al rode the clouds to the rescue of his people.

But the widow's plight raises the obvious question – 'where, pray, is Ba'al *today*?' What price Ba'al if *his* own people have neither bread nor oil! And so here in verses 8-16, the contest between Jehovah and Ba'al hots up, with Jehovah demonstrating that, while, according to pagan myth, Ba'al lies impotent in the Underworld during times of drought, *He* (the Lord)<sup>69</sup> is well able to *provide both of Ba'al's chief commodities* – corn<sup>70</sup> and oil – and that to *sustain a widow and her son of 'Ba'al's own people'* – and that in '*Ba'al's own territory*' – and that on a daily basis – to do so just as easily as He is able to provide corn and oil for *His* own people in *His* own land when they keep His covenant – as He had promised specifically more than once in the Book of Deuteronomy.<sup>71 72 73</sup>

But without the promise of verse 14 – riding as it does on the back of the Lord's favourite preface, 'fear not', in verse 13 – without the promise that Jehovah, the God of Israel, undertook to replenish and maintain the widows' meagre resources until such time as He sent rain to relieve the drought<sup>74</sup> ... without that promise, Elijah's demand in verse 13<sup>75</sup> – that she should use up what little she had left to make a cake for him 'first' – would have been the height of selfishness. And indeed, I note that both the words 'first' and 'afterward' are emphatic in the Hebrew text.<sup>76</sup>

Whereas, backed up by God's promise, this was simply a requirement that the widow demonstrate her faith in God's word, as the condition of securing His miraculous provision.<sup>77</sup>

For unless, with Abraham, she had been 'fully persuaded that, what' God 'had promised, He was able also to perform'<sup>78</sup>, she would never have used up her very last supplies as the prophet asked – she would never have parted with what she *could now see* to obtain what she *could not yet see*.<sup>79</sup>

But for her – as for all – 'faith is', as the writer to the Hebrews makes clear, 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'.<sup>80</sup>

Surely without such faith she would have responded in the words of our Lord to another mother from that very same area almost 900 years later, 'Let the children be filled first, for it is not right to take the children's bread ...'.<sup>81</sup> I refer, of course, to his words to the woman from, of all places, 'the region of Tyre and Sidon ... a Syro-Phoenician by birth'.<sup>82</sup>

For I note that, although the Lord Jesus Himself – as a 'minister of the circumcision'<sup>83</sup> – preached, taught and worked almost exclusively among 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel', as He described them when speaking to the woman,<sup>84</sup> He did, on that one occasion, enter pagan territory.

In effect, Elijah asked the widow to put God's interests—represented by himself, the prophet of Jehovah—before her own as the condition for her blessing. Seek first God's kingdom, Elijah was saying in effect, and all these things shall be added to you.<sup>85</sup>

And added they certainly were!<sup>86</sup> And to this widow, every new day<sup>87</sup> would be a fresh – indeed, an exciting – evidence of God's faithfulness to His promise ... His compassions didn't fail – they were new every morning.<sup>88</sup> And every morning – before dipping down into the jar and the cruse, both of which she knew she had *completely* emptied the day before, she would be able to pray – with a depth of feeling and meaning I cannot – 'Give us this day our daily bread' – with *absolute confidence* that the living God of Elijah *could*, and *would*, do just that.<sup>89</sup>

For the remainder of the 3½ years of drought, the sky would be cloudless.<sup>90</sup> Famine, barrenness and suffering would reduce Ba'al's country to a wasteland. But this small family would fare no worse out of a small flour jar and an oil cruse than if they had owned a *thousand corn-fields* and their *own private oil well*!<sup>91</sup>

And yet God saw fit to meet her need, not by providing her at one time with a store sufficient for several years – or even for several months – but by providing on a daily basis. For had He miraculously supplied her with many jars of meal and countless vessels full of oil, the existence of such a reserve would soon have been noised around the famished city, and, like as not, she would soon have lost all. But the Lord makes no mistakes. Praise God, the word ‘oops’ simply isn’t to be found in His dictionary! And so He – the all-wise God – supplied the widow, her son, and His prophet with their ‘daily bread’.

And in so doing, I say it again, Jehovah displays His power – *providing Ba'al's chief commodities* – to sustain a widow and her son from *among 'Ba'al's own people'* and that in *the heart of 'Ba'al's own country'*. No question then. If the dry brook at Cherith in verse 7 declared, ‘Round 1 to Jehovah!’ – the well-fed family at Zarephath in verse 16 proclaimed ‘Round 2 to Jehovah!’

Tomorrow evening, God willing, it will be a case of ‘Seconds out – round three’ – which occupies verses 17-24 of chapter 17 – where we will see how the Lord puts a further dent in the reputation of ‘high and mighty Ba'al’, giving additional proof that He – and He alone – is the true and living God.

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> 'Shall Command feed you there' – as v. 9. 'command' = v. 9 – order, charge, direct. 'Feed = sustain, v. 9 – sustain, feed, nourish, provide for. 'And he went, vv. 5, 10.
- <sup>2</sup> 'Ravens normally seek a home territory that is desolate and uninhabited', 'The Raven Speaks', by George F. Howe, Chairman of the Department of Sciences, Los Angeles Baptist College, Newhall, California. [See ... <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1969/JASA3-69Howe.html>.]
- <sup>3</sup> 'He ... rained down manna on them to eat', Psa. 78. 24.
- <sup>4</sup> 'And it came to pass in the evening, that quails came up, and covered the camp', Exod. 16. 13.
- <sup>5</sup> Exod. 16. 1-7, 31; Psa. 78. 24, and Exod. 16. 13; Num. 11. 31-32; Psa. 105. 40.
- <sup>6</sup> Scavengers of the sky. 'Ravens are scavengers and will eat just about anything that is dead; but they will also hunt for mice, lizards, small birds, snakes, insects, and berries', The Urban Dictionary. 'Ravens are scavengers and inhabit mountainous and wild hill country', the Canadian Encyclopaedia.
- <sup>7</sup> Tit. 1. 2; cf. Heb. 6. 18.
- <sup>8</sup> Lev. 11. 15; Deut. 14. 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Josh. 1. 16.
- <sup>10</sup> Matt. 4. 11.
- <sup>11</sup> Exod. 16. 12.
- <sup>12</sup> Job 38. 41; cf. Psa. 147. 9; Luke 12. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> Thomas Constable on 1 Kings 17. 1-7.
- <sup>14</sup> F. W. Krummacher, *Elijah the Tishbite*, 1838, page 24.
- <sup>15</sup> Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Also see a very good biblical article at : <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1969/JASA3-69Howe.html>.
- <sup>16</sup> Gen. 8. 6-9
- <sup>17</sup> But in obedience to God's 'command' the ravens of our chapter proved good and faithful servants to Elijah – bringing him, not a mere olive leaf – as Noah's dove – but bread and flesh every morning and every evening. Ravens are known to roost in desolate rocky areas, similar to the ravine through which the Cherith brook flowed – and have a habit of storing excess food in the crags there. For all I know, this may have been the way in which God provided for His servant's needs – the Lord expecting His servant to note where his breakfast and dinner was left, and to go and fetch it. But this is sheer speculation – we are not told – we know all that matters – that they delivered Elijah's meals to time – twice a day.
- <sup>18</sup> The same expression 'and it came to pass after ... ' as in verse 7 is repeated in verse 17 – and in both cases it spelt a problem of some sort for Elijah.
- <sup>19</sup> He was not immune from the effects of the drought.
- <sup>20</sup> 'The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails', Zeph. 3. 5.
- <sup>21</sup> Exod. 17. 6; Num. 20. 11; Judg. 15. 18, 19.
- <sup>22</sup> About 7/8 miles south of Sidon and 13 miles north of Tyre. 'It lies still, as no doubt it did then, on the high road between Tyre and Sidon, and on the shore. The prophet would thus be in the lion's den, in the very heart of the dominions of Ethbaal'.
- <sup>23</sup> 'It was a far cry from Cherith to Zarephath, right across the kingdom of Ahab; and to run for refuge to a dependency of Zidon, Jezebel's country, looked like putting his head in the lion's mouth', Alexander Maclaren.
- <sup>24</sup> 2 Chron. 15. 9.
- <sup>25</sup> 2 Chron. 17. 3, 6.
- <sup>26</sup> See Keil/Delitzsch on 2 Chron. 18. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> 1 Kings 18. 10.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Alright, Lord', somebody with prophetic vision might have responded, 'but it I must step on *gentile* soil, Moab would be much nearer – and Moab is the land from which King David's mother came!' But then, presumably, Ahab's net was also thrown over the land of Moab – for we know that Ahab's father Omri had conquered Moab some time before - as per the Moabite Stone. We know that our Lord referred to Elijah being 'sent' to Zarephath, in His first recorded address in His home synagogue of Nazareth, Luke 4. 25-26 – His point being that this was an early instance of God's favour spilling over beyond Israel to the gentiles – 'Many widows were *in Israel* in the days of Elijah ... but to *none of them* was Elijah sent, but to Zarephath of Sidon, to a widow woman' – with the suggestion, I suspect, that the gospel also would ultimately go to the Gentiles. And I note that, although the Lord Jesus Himself – as the 'minister of the circumcision', Rom. 15. 8 – preached, taught and worked almost exclusively among 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel', as He described them<sup>28</sup>, He did, on just one occasion, enter pagan territory – interestingly, leaving Galilee for 'the parts ('the region') of Tyre and Sidon' – the very area to which Elijah was sent, Matt. 15. 2. Well then did one commentator label Elijah 'the first apostle to the gentiles' – J. R. Lumby, Cambridge Bible quoting Dr John Lightfoot.



- <sup>29</sup> 'The dependence of Sarepta on Sidon is indicated in the inscriptions of Sennacherib, where it is mentioned as belonging to Luliya, king of Sidon', Canon Rawlinson in the Speaker's Commentary, quoted in the Pulpit Commentary.
- <sup>30</sup> 1 Kings 18. 17.
- <sup>31</sup> Matthew Henry on 1 Kings 17. 8-16.
- <sup>32</sup> Psa. 78. 19.
- <sup>33</sup> Psa. 23. 5.
- <sup>34</sup> Rev. 2. 13.
- <sup>35</sup> Alexander Maclaren on 1 Kings 17.
- <sup>36</sup> For the plight of the widow, see Richard D. Patterson, "The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:519 (July-September 1973):223-34.
- <sup>37</sup> John Gray, *I and II Kings*, page 380. The childless widow could appeal to the levirate law of Deut. 5. 5-10; cf. Matt. 22. 24.
- <sup>38</sup> Though demeaning.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Opening, entrance' – as 19. 13 of cave – not the normal word for a gate.
- <sup>40</sup> Heb. 'behold there, a widow woman'.
- <sup>41</sup> Gen. 24. 15.
- <sup>42</sup> Ruth 2. 3-4.
- <sup>43</sup> 2 Sam. 15. 31-32.
- <sup>44</sup> Acts 10. 17.
- <sup>45</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch.
- <sup>46</sup> 'The stories that call the main character "man of God" ... do seem to emphasise powerful actions, beyond the ability of ordinary people', New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, volume 4, page 573. Little did this woman think that she would be privileged to entertain one of the two men who would one day appear in glory with the Saviour on the Mount of Transfiguration! She was there on an errand of her own, viz., to gather a few dry sticks to kindle a fire to cook her last meal in this world. But, unknown to her, she was there also on an errand from God. She was commanded to sustain the prophet of Israel.
- <sup>47</sup> See its use in Exod. 5. 7, 12.
- <sup>48</sup> 'Two' sticks, v.12, may = small quantity. 'A few sticks' (Gesenius). Folk often say 'couple' when they don't mean two only.
- <sup>49</sup> 'Gathering sticks' – one of three people of whom read in Bible – an act of rebellion, Num. 15. 32-33 – not a good idea!; an act of helpfulness and humility, Acts 28 – not to be expected; but here an act of despair – hardly an encouraging sign.
- <sup>50</sup> Gen. 24. 14-18.
- <sup>51</sup> A word of entreaty.
- <sup>52</sup> In a vessel/container – not as v.12. v.13 = round cake or loaf bread. V.12 = flour. Flour in pitcher often used water – oil in jar, flask, jug.
- <sup>53</sup> It is clear that the water supply of Phoenicia had not entirely failed. "The fresh streams of Lebanon would retain their life-giving power long after the scantier springs of Palestine had been dried up", Stanley.
- <sup>54</sup> 1 Kings 17. 12. In the words of Annie Johnson Flint's great hymn 'He giveth more grace', this poor, desolate and starving woman had now – literally – 'reached the end of her hoarded resources'.
- <sup>55</sup> 2 Kings 1. 8; Matt. 3. 4; Heb. 11. 37. 'She recognized Elijah, perhaps by his Jewish face, probably by his prophetic dress ... as a worshipper of Jehovah', Pulpit Commentary.
- <sup>56</sup> The widow's words *in themselves* do not deny a personal belief in Jehovah (Obadiah, 18. 10, and 2 Sam. 14.11), any more than they do on the lips of the governor of Ahab's palace in verse 10 of the next chapter – but the widow's background argues strongly that she had no such faith at this point.
- <sup>57</sup> (One commentator) contends that Elijah first learnt from these words—the mention of a son and the absence of any mention of her husband—that he was addressing a "widow woman." But we read Gen. 38. 14, 19, of "*garments of widowhood*" (cf. Deut. 24. 17), and ver. 10, "a widow woman," &c., almost implies that Elijah from the first recognized her as such', Pulpit Commentary. That is, they probably both recognized what the other was by their clothing.
- <sup>58</sup> She who was to sustain his life is herself ready to die. But he knows whom he has believed!. He knows that "God will not suffer his word to fail, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips" (Psa. 89. 34).
- <sup>59</sup> 2 Tim. 1. 12.
- <sup>60</sup> Joshua 19. 28.
- <sup>61</sup> Deut. 33. 24.
- <sup>62</sup> In connection with "oil" being found in this widow's possession at Zarephath in Sidon, J. J. Blunt in his, "Undesigned Coincidences in the Old and New Testament," points out that on the division of Canaan the district of *Sidon* fell to the lot of *Asher* (Josh. 19. 28). Then he turns the reader back to Deuteronomy 33, reminding him that when Moses blessed the twelve tribes he said, "Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in *oil*" (v. 24)—indicating the fertility of that district and the character of its principal product.
- <sup>63</sup> In contrast to the comment of v. 7 – 'there was no rain in the land' – that is, there, in the land of Israel.

<sup>64</sup> The regions of Tyre and Sidon would be alright – after all, the average annual rainfall there was over double (30-35 inches) that of the Jordan Valley (10-15 inches) – of Cherith; *Oxford Bible Atlas*, page 51.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Now Menander mentions this drought in his account of the acts of Ethbaal, king of the Tyrians; where he says thus: “Under him, there was a want of rain from the month Hyperberetaeus till the month Hyperberetaeus of the year following; but when he made supplications, there came great thunders. This Ethbaal built the city Botrys, in Phoenicia, and the city Auza, in Libya.” — By these words he designed the want of rain that was in the days of Ahab; for at that time it was that Ethbaal also reigned over the Tyrians, as Menander informs us’, Josephus, *Antiquities*, VIII, 13. 2. ‘Nabuchodonosor besieged Tyre for thirteen years in the days of Ithobal, their king’. The king of Tyre, but southern coastland of Phoenicia was under Tyrian rule and rulers titled themselves king of the older settlement of Sidon. Ittobaal ruled for 32 years. not only king of the Sidonians but, according to Josephus (*Contra Apion*, I, 123 [18]), a priest of Astarte (alias Asherah) when he gained the throne by murdering the last of the descendants of Hiram I of Tyre. Ethbaal's dynasty endured for at least a century. Thus, as Josephus (*Antiq.*, VIII, 317 [xiii.1]) reports, he was king of Tyre and Sidon. For this Menander (as opposed to the Menander quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15), see ... [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menander\\_of\\_Ephesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menander_of_Ephesus), and compare ... <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menander>.

<sup>66</sup> For ‘Dagan’, see *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 1, page 163.

<sup>67</sup> The Ba'al Epic.

<sup>68</sup> A source (of blessing) to the earth was the rain of Baal and to the field(s) the rain of the Most High; a delight to the earth was the rain of Baal and to the field(s) the rain of the Most High, a delight to the wheat in the furrow, (to) the spelt in the tith.... The ploughmen did lift up (their) head(s), they that prepared the corn (did lift up their heads) on high; for the bread had failed (in) their bins, the wine had failed in their skins, the oil had failed in their (cruses) (CTA 16 iii 4–16; CML, 98), *The Legend of Kirtu*, cited in ‘The Polemic against Baalism in Israel's Early History and Literature’, Robert B. Chisholm Jr., Professor of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, V151 #603—Jul 94—270. ‘The fertility god Ba'al promised his worshipers agricultural prosperity’.

<sup>69</sup> Note the ‘loaded’ preface to Elijah's announcement in verse 14 – ‘Thus says *Jehovah*, the God of *Israel*’ – as God's servant delivers another broadside to high and mighty Ba'al.

<sup>70</sup> Wheat is a type of corn, from which flour is made.

<sup>71</sup> Deut. 7. 13; 11. 14.

<sup>72</sup> Based on the statements in the prologues of the Ur-Nammu Code and the Code of Hammurabi, it is clear that kings considered it part of their role as “wise rulers” to protect the rights of the poor, the widow and the orphan. Similarly, in the Egyptian Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the plaintiff begins by identifying his judge as “the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow.” Worshipers of Ba'al glory in his title of king. If a god is going to demonstrate his role as a king, one clear way of doing so is to show his concern for the vulnerable by caring for the needs of a widow in desperate need. In the important city of Ugarit, the theme of the widow, the orphan, and the poor is attested. Two cases of royal figures are well known. In the Aqhat Epic, Dan'el the king is described in the following fashion: Thereupon Dan'el the Raphaman... picks himself up ... he sits before the gate ... he judges the cause of the widow(s) ... he adjudicates the case of the fatherless.

In another epic story, King Keret, who has fallen seriously ill, is confronted by his grasping son with these words: ‘You did not judge the cause of the widow, you did not adjudicate the case of the wretched, you did not drive out them that preyed upon the poor; you did not feed the orphan before you or the widow behind you’.

<sup>73</sup> Note the confidence with which the prophet spoke: his positive and unwavering assurance that their supply should not diminish. Elijah had proved the faithfulness of Jehovah by the brook, and therefore was he now qualified to quiet the fears and comfort the heart of this poor widow—compare 2 Corinthians 1. 3, 4.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Until the day that the Lord sends rain’ suggests that her present sad situation was due to the drought. And that, therefore, there had been time for the drought to have gotten a hold. Chapter 18 opens with a reference to ‘the third year’ – which would by Jewish reckoning be one whole year plus parts of two other years [See my notes on ‘Three days and three nights.’] This period must probably be dated from Elijah's arrival at Zarephath in 1 Kings 17. 10. From this expression alone, he could have spent anything between ‘one and a bit’ years there to almost three years. His time at Cherith would therefore have been anything between a little over six months to almost two and a half years – before the brook there dried up, 1 Kings 17. 7. But the expression ‘after many days’, 1 Kings 18. 1 (especially coming, as it does, following ‘after days’, 1 Kings 17. 15 (‘a whole year’, JND), and ‘after these things’ in 1 Kings 17. 17), seems to indicate a period longer than the simple ‘after a while’, 1 Kings 17. 7. It is probably safe to conclude therefore that Elijah spent a longer time at Zarephath than he had at Cherith – perhaps between one to one and a half years at Cherith, followed by between two to two and a half years at Zarephath. (Compare Keil and Delitzsch on 1 Kings 18. 1.)

<sup>75</sup> Softened by the Lord's favourite preface; ‘fear not’.

<sup>76</sup> By position.

<sup>77</sup> The “first” and “afterwards” are emphatic by position. The barrel would have been empty by nightfall, if the meal in it had been used for the woman and her son. The continuance of supply depended on her obedience, which, in its turn, depended on faith in the prophet as a messenger of God.

<sup>78</sup> Rom. 4. 21.

<sup>79</sup> If this prophet could multiply food, as he professed to be able to do, why should he ask her for bread? Was it reasonable that she should part with her last morsel on the strength of such a promise? “Let the children first be filled.” “Shall I take my bread and my water and give it to one that I know not whence he is?” (1 Sam. 25. 11) Thus

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she might justly have argued. We could not have wondered had the ordeal been too great for her; had she kept fast hold of her children's bread and denied it to "dogs." But, like that other Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt. 15. 21 sqq.), her faith was equal to the test; she "went and did according to the saying of Elijah." And, therefore, of her also it might justly be said, "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel".

<sup>80</sup> Heb. 11. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Mark 7. 27.

<sup>82</sup> Mark 7. 24-26.

<sup>83</sup> Rom. 15. 8.

<sup>84</sup> Matt. 15. 24; cf. Matt. 10. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Matt. 6. 33. Compare 2 Cor. 9. 6-11 – especially v. 10 – God certainly multiplied here! Not getting or holding or hoarding is the way to abundance – but giving. She had far more reason than Nabal to ask, "Shall I take my bread (as 1 Kings 17. 11) and my oil and give it to one that I know not whence he is?", 1 Sam. 25. 10-11. But 'she went and did according to the word' – Heb. exactly as Elijah in verse 4. She was prepared to venture her last means of support upon her trust in Jehovah and in His word. A widow who, not quite, but almost gave all she had – cf. Mark 12. 41-44 – whose sacrificial trust is a contrast to the ostentation of the Pharisees (vv. 38-40) among whose sins are listed the 'devouring of widows' houses'. And Elijah's God would indeed pay her very well for the 'little cake' she was to make and bring. God not make cake for her – contrast 1 Kings 19. 6 – He simply saw to it that the necessary ingredients were always on hand as they were needed.

<sup>86</sup> 'Having received a prophet in the name of a prophet, she received a prophet's reward. (Matt. 10:41, 42). Stanley suggests that our Lord, when He spoke of the "cup of cold water," may have had this incident in his mind', Pulpit Commentary.

<sup>87</sup> 'The widow and her household did eat of the multiplied meal "days", a term which is by some Hebraists understood, when used without qualification, to denote a year', Pulpit Commentary.

<sup>88</sup> Lam. 3. 22-23.

<sup>89</sup> Why did not God give her a granary full of meal at once, and a vat full of oil? How much of it would have been left by the next day – for in days of famine men are sharp of scent - and it would soon have been noised about the city – and in four and twenty hours the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil would have been as empty as at the first. But also, as with ravens, for Elijah, the life of faith was a dependent life. It was not a barrel of meal or a cruse of oil that was promised. The supplies of grace are indeed unlimited, but sufficient for each day with no store for the morrow – as with manna. God had not said, 'the barrel of meal will overflow', but only that it would 'not waste'.

<sup>90</sup> With the stars not weeping one single tear of dew.

<sup>91</sup> It would be true of them, as David once wrote of the upright, 'in the days of famine they shall be satisfied', Psa. 37.19. We gather from Luke 4. 25, 26, that it was for her sake as well as his that the prophet was sent thither. Matt. 15. 21-28 tells of another Syro-Phoenician woman. I note that, although the Lord Jesus Himself – as the 'minister of the circumcision', Rom. 15. 8 – preached, taught and worked almost exclusively among 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel', as He described them<sup>91</sup>, He did, on just one occasion, enter pagan territory – interestingly, leaving Galilee for 'the parts ('the region') of Tyre and Sidon' – the very area to which Elijah was sent, Matt. 15. 2. Well then did one commentator label Elijah 'the first apostle to the gentiles' – J. R. Lumby, Cambridge Bible quoting Dr John Lightfoot.