

## I Kings 17 - a Battle In Metaphor

Catherine Taylor

This chapter is packed.

To understand our story it will be helpful for us to remember Mesopotamians believed what happens between powers on earth is representative of and caused by battle between gods in the heavens. This text is about such a battle.

I think it will be helpful to remember that Hebrew is a language and a culture based in metaphor.

As a caveat, I think you already know that I live in great controversy theology where the issue for me is “Do I believe God is a God of love or a God focused and power and ways to use it”. I think it’s important to know the biases of authors.

### **The word list:**

Elijah: My God is Yahweh. Yahweh is the covenant iteration of the Deity.

Tishbe: Can sometimes just mean the place name but has the connotation of “captivity.”

Baal: husband or lord (note that Yahweh uses the same metaphors to describe Their relationship with Israel) Baal is the god of storms, fertility, and thunder.

Asherah: chief female or mother goddess of fertility, love and war. Her worship was promoted by Ahab. Worship often included sexual rituals.

Eastward – can mean before times/antiquity.

Kerith – winter storm.

Sidon – ruled by Ethbaal (note the name within the name) whose daughter was Jezebel.

Jezebel – “Baal exalts”, “unexalted”, “without cohabitation”. Sometime considered a priestess of Baal and certainly a supporter of that god’s worship.

### **The story unfolds:**

1. Yahweh sends one of the most powerful prophets in Biblical literature to the leader of the tribes who have most rejected Them.
2. His representative goes to the titular head of Baal worship as well as of Israel and declares war. Baal is in charge of rain and fertility. It will be shown that Baal is not the one in charge. *Catherine thinks that if Ahab had repented at that point there would have been no drought and looks forward to hearing your thoughts on that matter.*
3. In a show of Yahweh’s power for believers, Their representative will be fed and watered in the midst of drought.
4. When the river dries up Yahweh sends Elijah straight into the core of enemy territory.
5. Where there, in the middle of Baal worship, there is a widow and her child.
6. In a place supposedly ruled by Baal where there is no food, this person of Sidon chooses to be generous to a stranger and is rewarded with food. (which Baal, the God of fertility did not provide).
7. The writer points the power of this out in Elijah’s words. “The Lord the God of Israel will feed you until the covenant God brings rain upon the land.” The covenant is not just with Israel but with those who believe.
8. The boy comes down with a potentially fatal illness. And that tests Elijah’s faith.
9. Elijah called on the Diety with Whom he has chosen to make a covenant relationship....not once but three times.

### Questions for the week:

1. Given its history, why send such a powerful prophet to Israel?
2. What do you see of the character of God in that decision?
3. Why do you think Yahweh's message to Elijah sends him to the Kerith Valley for protection? He could have gone anywhere. Why here and with this diet and its servers?
4. Why send Elijah to Sidon? What was the message to Elijah? What was the message to the readers?
5. From this story, how would you describe the author?
6. What do you think the author wants us to learn?
7. When Elijah could clearly talk to royalty, why send him to a widow?
8. What might that assignment have to do with Yahweh vs Baal?
9. Given all that's going on in regional Mesopotamian politics, why would Elijah use the phrase "The Lord God of Israel" in verse 14?
10. What are the ways vs. 20 can be a comfort to us?
11. What might be an instruction in vs. 21?
12. In verse 24, why do you think it took this event for her to say "I believe". Do you think it had anything to do with local Baal worship?

### For our own selves:

1. What was your favorite part of this story?
2. Were there any lessons for your personal journey?

It's a joy for me to think about these things with you. I look forward to seeing you and hearing your thoughts soon.

*Catherine*

