

1 Kings 17:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

Analysis

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. Elijah bursts onto the biblical scene without introduction or genealogy, emphasizing his prophetic rather than hereditary authority. The designation 'Tishbite' (Tishbi, תִּשְׁבִּי) likely refers to Tishbe in Gilead, east of the Jordan—remote, rugged territory that shaped this fearless prophet. Gilead's wilderness character prepared Elijah for confronting royal apostasy and enduring hardship in obedience to God.

Elijah's oath formula 'As the LORD God of Israel liveth' (chai YHWH Elohei Yisrael, חַי־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) asserts Yahweh's reality against Baal worship. While Ahab and Jezebel promoted Baalism—which promised fertility through Baal the storm god—Elijah announces that the living God controls rain and drought. The phrase 'before whom I stand' (asher amadti lephanav, אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתִּי לְפָנָיו) describes the prophet's position as servant in God's court, emphasizing his authority comes from divine commission.

The drought judgment 'but according to my word' (ki im-lefi devari, כִּי אִם-לְפִי דְבָרִי) demonstrates the prophet's authority to speak God's word. Elijah's word has power because it carries divine authority. This three-year drought (mentioned in Luke 4:25, James 5:17) would prove that Yahweh, not Baal, controls nature. The

confrontation addresses Israel's central crisis: will they serve the living God or dead idols? Elijah's ministry calls the nation back to covenant faithfulness through dramatic demonstrations of Yahweh's sovereignty.

Historical Context

Elijah's ministry occurred during Ahab's reign (c. 874-853 BCE), perhaps the darkest period in northern Israel's history. Ahab had married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal king of Sidon, bringing virulent Baalism into Israel (16:31). Jezebel aggressively promoted Baal worship, killing Yahweh's prophets and establishing 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (18:19). This represented existential threat to Israelite faith—would the covenant nation abandon Yahweh entirely?

Baalism promised agricultural fertility through ritual practices honoring Baal (storm god) and Asherah (fertility goddess). Canaanite religion taught that Baal's death and resurrection annually controlled the weather cycle, bringing rain for crops. By declaring drought 'according to my word,' Elijah threw down the gauntlet: if Baal controls rain, let him send it. The three-year drought would demonstrate Baal's impotence and Yahweh's sovereignty over nature.

Archaeological evidence from sites like Samaria confirms the influx of Phoenician culture and religion during Ahab's reign. Ivory carvings showing Phoenician artistic styles, luxury goods from Mediterranean trade, and architectural features reflecting Phoenician influence all indicate the cultural assimilation that accompanied religious syncretism. Elijah stood against this tide, representing the prophetic tradition that called Israel back to exclusive worship of Yahweh and obedience to covenant law.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What false 'gods' or ideological systems in contemporary culture promise what only the true God can provide, and how should Christians respond?
2. How does Elijah's authority from 'standing before God' challenge both pride in human credentials and feelings of inadequacy for ministry and witness?
3. In what situations is God calling you to courageous witness that might require speaking uncomfortable truths despite potential opposition or cost?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלֵי הוּ	הַתִּשְׁבִּי י	מִתְשֵׁב י	גִלְעָד	אֶל
said	And Elijah	the Tishbite	who was of the inhabitants	of Gilead	H413
H559	H452	H8664	H8453	H1568	
אֶחָב	חִי	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֲשֶׁר ר
unto Ahab	liveth	As the LORD	God	of Israel	H834
H256	H2416	H3068	H430	H3478	H5975
לִפְנֵי יו	אִם	יְהוָה ה	הַשָּׁנִים ים	הָאֵל לָה	ט ל
before	H518	H1961	these years	H428	there shall not be dew
H6440			H8141		H2919
וְיִמָּטֵר					ר
					H4306
אִם כִּי	לִפְי	דְּבָרִי:			
H3588	H518	but according	to my word		
		H6310	H1697		

Additional Cross-References

James 5:17 (Parallel theme): Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

Luke 1:17 (References Lord): And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

1 Kings 22:14 (References Lord): And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.

2 Kings 3:14 (References Lord): And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

Revelation 11:6 (Parallel theme): These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

Romans 11:2 (Word): God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,

Matthew 7:29 (Parallel theme): For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Deuteronomy 10:8 (References Lord): At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day.

Luke 9:30 (Parallel theme): And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:

Luke 21:36 (Parallel theme): Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.