

2. Elijah is God's man for the crisis. His job is to communicate the miracle of logistical grace support for himself, the widow, and the child. These provisions will sustain them for the next three years while drought conditions prevail throughout the Northern Kingdom.
3. This miracle has restored order in the widow's soul for the moment, however, she is still not grace oriented nor is she focused on God's control of the situation.
4. Again, Elijah has his own test to pass. He valiantly faced down Ahab at his palace when he told him the news that a drought would prevail over the Northern Kingdom until he gave the word for it to stop.
5. The prophet's next test was his six-month isolation in the mountains of Gilead where his logistics were provided by ravens and the brook Cherith.
6. Presently, he is isolated in the home of a doctrineless believer whose biblical inventory of ideas consists of virtually no grace orientation. She has a son, who presently is not a believer, but will become one later.
7. Although chapter 17 continues with verse 17, its opening phrase indicates that a significant amount of time elapsed between verses 16 and 17:

**1 Kings 17:17a**  
things ...

Now it came about after these

1. Probably two years have passed between verses 16 and 17. During this time, Elijah has been able to get the widow's doctrinal inventory up to speed and the child has been evangelized along the way.
2. For two years these three have been isolated inside the woman's home and its immediate environs. The child has become an adolescent and Elijah has presented the gospel to him to which he responded positively.
3. The verse opens with the preposition, **אַחַר ('achar)**: "after," which refers to 1 Kings 17:10–16. This is followed by the Qal plural imperfect of the verb, **חָלָה (chalah)**: "these things," referring to the previous two years.
4. During this period at Zérephath, Elijah continued to learn doctrine and then communicate it to the widow and her son. His advance occurred during a time he had no contact with anyone other than the two members of the household.
5. He was isolated by himself at the brook Cherith and in the company of only the woman and the boy at Zérephath. During that time, he also grew in grace as the Lord prepared him to confront Ahab on Mount Cárnel.



6. The events that will transpire on the promontory will require maximum doctrine accompanied by courage, endurance, faith, confidence, and steadfastness as he challenges the religious factions led by Ahab and the cosmic priests of Baal.
7. It was within the solitude and tranquility of Zárephath that enabled Elijah to concentrate on and facilitate doctrines in his soul that prepared him for the scheduled confrontation with Ahab.
8. Yet in the midst of this tranquility, another test confronted Elijah. The test is two-fold. Elijah must continue to depend on divine provisions that sustain his spiritual growth, and his doctrinal application regardless of the circumstances.
9. The situation that was about to occur will require him to never take his eyes off the source and purpose of God's plan, His grace, and His provisions. The boy's mother still must learn to orient and adjust to the plan of God, not the circumstances of life.
10. The circumstance was focused on the boy:

**1 Kings 17:17b** ... the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.

1. Soul stability is challenged when current tranquility is interrupted by a crisis. When this does occur, the soul of the individual must have the doctrinal inventory to orient and adjust.
2. A believer who is in spiritual maturity is able to adjust to the situation by first of all maintaining tranquility of soul which allows him to address the circumstance and determine the best course of action to address it.
3. This might be referred to as the doctrine of being "relaxed under pressure," the ability to focus on the crisis while maintaining clarity of thought.
4. Elijah is receiving data from two simultaneous sources. First, the son has just died from his illness followed immediately by the second, the mother's accusation that Elijah's real purpose for his visit was to punish her by killing her son.
5. Not so. The boy has died from an illness, indicated by the phrase "there was no breath left in him." In the Hebrew text, the phrase actually reads, "there was not left in him breath." The phrase, "was no breath left in him" is the Niph'al passive imperfect of the verb, **הָיָה** (*hayah*), meaning that something about the boy is missing and continues to be so.



6. The word that completes the statement is the noun, נְשָׁמָה (*neshamah*), translated “breath,” but it refers to the absence of his soul. The boy is dead physically because the life of an individual is in the soul, not the body.
7. Although the boy’s body is dead, his soul, which possesses eternal life, is absent from the body but in the care of the Lord.
8. The child’s health declined every day so that his illness ultimately led to his death.
9. The mother does not know this doctrine, thus realizing that her son is dead caused her to revert back to human-viewpoint rationales. From that perspective, she strikes out at Elijah:

**1 Kings 17:18** So she said to Elijah, “What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!”

1. The woman has gone into reversion due to a guilt complex. In her past, she committed a sin that she assumed God had not forgiven and the death of her son was her punishment for it by means of Elijah.
2. She is irrational. She blames Elijah for the death of her son concluding that he is God’s whip and if he had not entered her home the discipline would have been avoided.
3. Whatever she once did is not the issue and Elijah has no knowledge of her sinful past. The issue before them is suffering for blessings, a situation designed to teach the grace of God in a crisis.
4. Elijah, on the other hand, has remained copacetic. He realizes that this situation is designed to teach the grace of God in a crisis. The child is the means by which the power of God and His grace is in control of the situation.
5. The widow’s sin is not an issue, yet she is failing because of it. Elijah orients and adjusts realizing that the grace of God is greater than the circumstance.
6. This woman is a Gentile, not a Jew. God’s grace is extended to anyone who will believe which is clearly established in Scripture:

**Acts 14:1** In Iconium they [ Paul and Barnabas ] entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed both of Jews and of Greeks.



**Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**Romans 10:12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him.

**Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

7. These verses establish the universality of the gospel message being efficacious to everyone whether Jew or Greek, whether Jew or Gentile, for they “are all one in Christ Jesus.”
8. The widow is a believer although not very far advanced in doctrine. She has not resolved a sin committed years ago yet when she expressed her faith in Jesus Christ, all those previous sins were forgiven.
9. As an unbeliever she had been influenced by the culture of her fellow citizens in Sidonia which were followers of the Baal cult including its involvement in idolatry:

**As the sun-god, Baal was worshipped under two aspects, beneficent and destructive. Human victims were sacrificed to him in order to appease his anger in time of plague, the victims being usually the first-born of the sacrificer and being burnt alive. In the Old Testament this is euphemistically termed “passing” the victim “through the fire” (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6).**

**After the time of Ahab, the name became associated with the worship and rites of the Phoenician deity introduced into Samaria by Jezebel, and its idolatrous associations accordingly caused it to fall into disrepute.**

**Temples of Baal at Samaria and Jerusalem are mentioned in 1 Kings 16:32; 2 Kings 11:18; where they had been erected at that time when the Ahab dynasty endeavored to fuse Israelites and Jews and Phoenicians into a single people under the same national Phoenician god.**



The temple of Baal contained an image of the god in the shape of a pillar or Bethel [house of god] (2 Kings 10:26, 27). In the reign of Ahab, Baal was served in Israel by 450 priests (1 Kings 18:19), as well as by prophets (2 Kings 10:19), and his worshippers wore special vestments when his ritual was performed (2 Kings 10:22). The ordinary offering made to the god consisted of incense and burnt sacrifices; on extraordinary occasions the victim was human (Jeremiah 19:5). At times the priests worked themselves into a state of ecstasy, and dancing round the altar slashed themselves with knives (1 Kings 18:26, 28), like certain dervish orders in modern Islam.<sup>1</sup>

10. Prior to her salvation, the widow could easily have been a votary of Baal since the practice in Phoenicia was well established. The problem with guilt is its tremendous influence on those who are involved in its idolatrous practices.
11. This possibly could be the causes of her guilt complex in light of her comments to Elijah when she accuses him of holding her responsible for her sin and to gain retribution by putting her son to death.
12. The woman's guilt caused her to revert back to her involvement with the practices of the Baal cult. Elijah cannot allow this idea to gain credence so he acts immediately:

**1 Kings 17:19a** He said to her, “Give [ Qal imperative of the verb, נתן (nathan) ] me your son.”

1. Elijah acts immediately. In light of the progress that had been made by the woman's gradual advance into doctrinal rationales, the death of her son sent her into reversionism.
2. She had been burdened by a past sin that could have been associated with Baal worship. She had been able to suppress this problem as she grew in grace under Elijah's ministry.
3. Then, due to the death of her son, that latent sin emerged into her conscious mind and she leaped to the erroneous conclusion that Elijah was not in town to teach her doctrine, but to kill her son as retribution for her past sin.

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Sayce, “Baal,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 1:345–46.



4. Elijah realized that the situation must be rectified so he ordered her to give him the boy which she did. This indicated that over the course of the past two years, the woman had acquired authority orientation toward Elijah:

**1 Kings 17:19b** Then he took him from her bosom [ **קִיָּץ** (*cheyq*): lap ] and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed.

5. After laying the boy down on his bed, Elijah prays to the Father:

**1 Kings 17:20** He called on the Lord and said, “O Lord my God, have you also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?”

6. Elijah summarizes the situation in his appeal to the Father. He understands there is a purpose for it. He is not blaming God, but he does know that he must understand the reason for it.
7. What he does know is that the mother has retrogressed from her spiritual growth back to the human viewpoint common with her involvement in the worship of Baal.
8. In 1 Kings, it was generally the case throughout the Levant that Judah, Israel, and Phoenicia, including their capital cities of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Zárezphath, worshiped Baal and carried out its rituals.
9. Archaeological discoveries confirm the impact of the Baal worship in the context of our passage:

**Zárezphath: 1 Kings 17.** A city on the Mediterranean coast 14 miles north of Tyre and 8 miles south of Sidon, Zárezphath is mentioned in Neo-Assyrian records of the seventh century B.C. In the Roman period the city featured a shrine to the goddess Tannit, to whom child sacrifices are believed to have been made.

1 Kings 17 demonstrates in no uncertain terms that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was more powerful than the Canaanite god Baal, who was worshiped as the god of rain and fertility and the vanquisher of death. But in 1 Kings 17 the God of Israel provides sustenance during a famine and proves his power over death in the raising of a child (v.22).



**The next chapter, 1 Kings 18, recounts the triumph of Yahweh and his prophet over Baal and his prophets.<sup>2</sup>**

10. The worship of Baal is prevalent throughout the Old Testament occurring 99 times and mentioned in 10 books. Thirty-five occurrences are found in the books of 1 and 2 Kings.
11. We may summarize the religious impact Baal worship had upon the Jewish populations during the period of the divided kingdoms as a “loss of thought.”
12. “Loss of thought” is a term I concocted to describe the effects of reversionism. The Jews were organized under the guidance of the Mosaic Law including regularly scheduled rituals directed by the Levitical Priesthood.
13. Over time these rituals were no longer being practiced in the manner authorized by the Mosaic Law, or Pentateuch. The Jewish community in Palestine during the time of our Lord’s lifetime was dominated by the scribes who ignored Scripture in favor of what they called the Oral Law.
14. It was not until the early third century A.D. that the Oral Law was put into writing known as the Talmud which consists of two subdivisions, the Míshna and the Gemára. This biblical decline shows Jewish loss of thought.
15. There was no written text for the worship of Baal, but it had its followers in various cities, each having its own version and execution of its rituals. Here is a summary:

**Baal and the Fertility Cults. The worship of the Canaanite storm god Baal was an object of singular condemnation by Hosea and other prophets. The vehemence of the prophetic condemnation of the cult reflects just how extensive and pernicious the problem was.**

**1 Kings 18: the contest involving Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, illustrating the popularity of the Baal cult and its use of self-laceration for demonstrating devotion to Baal.**

**The basic meaning of the word *baal* is “lord,” and this appropriately suggests Baal’s importance in Canaanite religion. He was called “prince Baal (Lord) of the earth.”**

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<sup>2</sup> “Zarephath,” in *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corp., 2005), 514.



Not only was Baal exalted as a chief deity, but he also functioned specifically as the Canaanite storm god, the “rider of the clouds.” The birth of healthy offspring and the staving off of famine were major concerns in the ancient Near East.

For Israel—an agrarian society situated in a dry climate—the veneration of a god who could send rain proved to be an irresistible enticement. One Canaanite myth attributed agricultural fertility to the “rain of Baal.”

The fact that the Israelites identified Baal with Yahweh is telling. Although Baal worship, viewed from a distance, was obviously horrendous, those who were involved in it were so influenced by the dominant culture that they remained convinced that they were devout and orthodox followers of the Lord—when they were all the while worshipping Baal.<sup>3</sup>

16. It is from these excerpts that we are able to develop God’s purpose for allowing the illness to take the young boy’s life:
  1. The city of Zārephath is among the coastal cities of Phoenicia that among so many others in the Levant are deep into the worship of Baal.
  2. The mother was a devoted follower of Baal before she was saved but those wheel-tracks remain facilitated to a certain degree. Here belief in the Messiah is recent and her spiritual growth about Him has been increasing over the two-year ministry of Elijah but still with a way to go.
  3. When her son died, her exclamation to Elijah was, “What do I have to do with you, O man of God?” The proper noun, “God,” is the Hebrew, אֱלֹהִים (*’elohim*).
  4. She follows this with the accusation that Elijah, a “man of God,” has come into her home to kill her son because of a sin she had committed.
  5. This comment indicates her reversion had taken her back mentally to the policies enforced by the priests of Baal.

<sup>3</sup> “Baal and the Fertility Cults,” in *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (2005), 1414.





6. Those who violated standards imposed by the priests of Baal had to be dealt with including on some occasions by death. The woman is reverting back to such a situation in her life and jumping to the conclusion that God was punishing her by having Elijah put her son to death.
7. Elijah cannot allow this assumption to go unaddressed. He must not allow Elohim to be accused of killing the child nor allow Elijah to be His enforcer.
8. To prevent this, Elijah commands the woman to give him her son. He took the boy to the upper bedroom where he slept and put him on the bed.
9. Elijah needed answers so he began to pray. Here is an expanded translation of:

**1 Kings 17:20** He called to the Lord and said, “O Lord God, regarding the widow, with whom I am a guest, why have you brought disaster by causing the death of her son?” (EXT)

1. This is not an indictment on God, but a request for guidance on why this event was allowed to occur. The issue here does not emphasize the death of the boy, but the reasons for it.
2. What Elijah solicits is understanding from which he will obtain clarity of thought. What he desires is divine guidance by inquiring of the Lord:
 

“His mother was formally a worshipper of Baal, but she has placed her faith in You and Your Son, Messiah, instead. This event has caused her to revert back to her former idolatry when the priests of Baal would offer up a person as a sacrifice to a false god.”
3. Elijah then begins a ritual that leads to the divine response:
 

**1 Kings 17:21** Elijah stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the Lord, “O Lord, my God, please let this boy’s soul [נִפְשׁוֹ (*nephesh*): the animating force of a trichotomous being, i.e., soul life ] return to him.”
4. There were three works of divine grace and provisions that Elijah experienced during his mission for the Lord. Elijah received them from God on three occasions:
  1. The logistical grace provisions for six months at the brook Cherith—food from the ravens and water from the arroyo.



2. His meeting with the widow in Zárezphath and her willingness to sequester him in her home until the time comes for him to confront Ahab.
3. The display of divine power and grace with regard to the restoration of the boy's soul life to his lifeless body.
5. The final three verses of chapter 17 include the climax of these three events so far in Elijah's campaign for the Lord:

**1 Kings 17:22** The Lord answered Elijah's prayer, and the soul of the boy returned within him and he lived.

**v. 23** Elijah took the child and caused [ the Hiph'il, causative active voice of the verb **רָרַץ** (*yarath*) ] the boy to walk downstairs from the upper bedroom into the ground level and took him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." (EXT)

6. At this point the mother's reversionistic detour is converted to the glorious realization that something divine had just happened. Her response to Elijah moved her out of depression into the recognition of absolute truth:

**1 Kings 17:24** Then the woman said to Elijah, "I am in the process of learning that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is absolute truth [ **אֱמֶת** (*'emeth*) ]." (EXT)

**Truth. Theology:** That which is considered to be the ultimate ground of reality. *Truth* is a comprehensive term that in all of its nuances implies accuracy and honesty. *Veracity* is adherence to the truth.<sup>4</sup>

7. **Principle:** Often testing and disaster in life is designed to remind each one of us that the most important thing in life is doctrine whose immutable content is truth: (1) **אֱמֶת** (*'emeth*) and (2) **ἀλήθεια** (*alétheia*).
8. In client nation America we are nearing a place historically where we are helpless and hopeless from the human viewpoint. Yet, we have truth of the Word of God in our souls and the One that rides point is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is *Yehowah Sevaoth*—the Lord of the Armies.

(End RECK-20.06. See RECK-20.07 for continuation of study at p. 61.)

<sup>4</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), s.v. "truth."

