

1 Kings 17

## Aim of Lesson

To show that God will provide for people who trust, love and obey him.

## Background study

Deuteronomy 11:11-17; 13:1-5; Jeremiah 35:15; Matthew 10:41; James 5:17. Find a map showing Cherith Brook, flowing past Tishbe, Elijah's home town, and Zarephath.

## Suggested outline of lesson

In order to start at a point which the children will understand, it will be necessary to discuss with them the influence of leaders. Their knowledge will be limited to those people in authority over them, such as teachers, parents, etc. Try to get them to see that the integrity of those in authority is all-important. No doubt they take it for granted that teachers are good people on whom they can rely. Get them to consider how different it would be if people in authority were wicked, selfish and cruel, and if there was no one to teach them what was right. Then introduce the characters of Ahab and Jezebel, who, as leaders of God's people, were setting the wrong example. They cared nothing for God's laws or for the needs of their subjects. They even worshipped strange gods, idols that were man-made.

With the aid of a map, show the extent of the kingdom of Israel and remind the children of the division of God's people into two kingdoms. Briefly summarize the succession of wicked kings, the decline of godliness and the growth of idolatry in Israel, culminating in the evil reign of Ahab under the strong, pagan influence of Jezebel. Deeply grieved at this state of affairs, God chose someone to teach the people the truth about him and to try to lead them in the right way of life. This man was Elijah. Explain to the children that he was not a king, but a prophet; and at some point in the lesson it will be necessary to explain that a prophet was not only a good teacher but also a man given special power by God - that of foretelling the future. He also had authority to speak God's words to his people, and so he was held in awe as God's messenger.

It is important to note that, whereas most of the people were afraid of the autocratic King Ahab, Elijah showed no fear in approaching him in spite of the dire prediction he was to make. Elijah spoke with God's authority and needed to fear no man. Describe the scene of this encounter, contrasting the rugged plainness of Elijah's appearance - his simple clothes, strong features, compelling glance and confident bearing - with the guilty expression and apprehension of the spineless king and his heathen queen. Discuss their reaction to Elijah's words and their growing fear as, over the ensuing months, his prophecy was confirmed.

But, unlike the people, Elijah had no need to be over-anxious because he trusted in the true God. He knew that God had promised, through Moses, that those who obeyed and served God truly would be provided for. Describe how God cared for him, first at the brook (indicate the places on the map) and then by directing him to the woman of Zarephath (ironically over the border near Sidon whence Jezebel had come). In focusing on the plight of this poor widow, try to help the children imagine themselves as the woman, and to think how they would react to a stranger asking for food when all that was left was barely sufficient for one last meal. Her answer to Elijah's plea indicates that she recognized him as a man of God and because of this she was ready to believe his words and follow his instructions. Her faith, which she demonstrated by her actions, was rewarded. Note that the flour and oil were provided on a daily basis, for their immediate needs only. Each day they would be reminded of God's care and their dependence upon him.

Tell the children how pleasant it would have been if the story ended there, but the widow's troubles were not over. Describe the tragedy of her son's death - he would have been the focus of her life - and her despairing outburst. She turned to the only one she could trust and he in turn appealed to God on her behalf. Convey the wonder of the miracle of restored life and the overwhelming joy of the mother. Her faith and trust in the living God were now absolute.

## Relevance to the children's lives

It must have been hard for the widow of Zarephath to be generous. She could have claimed that she had a good reason for not sharing. How much do we need to have in order to be able to share it with others? What sort of person, then, is a generous person?

## Worksheets

The message of the ravens is 'At the Cherith Brook God fed Elijah with bread and meat'; the code reads 'After a while the brook dried up because there had been no rain'.

## Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for your daily care. All that we have comes from you. Help us to be generous and share with others what you have given us. Amen.

## Memory verse

"And the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth ...'" (1 Kings 17:24).