“Strange Provisions” (1 Kings 17:1-16) Scripture Reading: Luke 22:39-46

October 5th, 2025 Memory Verse: 1 Kings 17:9

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Today we are going to jump into 1 Kings chapter 17. As you might imagine, that means we are skipping over 16 previous chapters. Now, I don’t skip them because they are skippable. They are important too, they constitute the word of God and chapters 1-16 deserve our time and attention. The book of Kings begins with Israel’s greatest king, David. From there the book recounts the lives and works of each king to follow. So next in line is King Solomon, David’s son. But after Solomon dies, already things get complicated as God’s people become split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The book of Kings follows the rule and reign of the monarchs of both kingdoms and, very helpfully, the author not only tells us what these kings said and did, but we are also given some commentary as to the quality of each king. Were they good or bad or somewhere in-between? And the plumbline used to determine the answer to this question boils down to **[SLIDE 2]** faithfulness to the Lord. Have these kings acted in accordance with the will of God or have they pursued other things? Well, at the end of 1 Kings chapter 16, King Omri of Israel dies. He ruled as king for 12 years and in verse 25 we get this commentary: “Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, more evil than anyone who preceded him.” See what I mean about helpful commentary. So, to be clear, Omri’s ancestors, the previous kings of Israel, also committed evil in the eyes of God. None of them, same for David, were excellent or pleasing to God, but Omri…he was just the worst yet. Eventually Omri dies and his son **[SLIDE 3]** Ahab takes over the throne. And verse 30 says, “Ahab did evil in the eyes of the LORD, more than anyone who preceded him.” So you can see the trajectory here. Ahab found it easy to walk in the sins of his ancestors. He even upped the bar and increased his disobedience to God and his ways. We are told that Ahab married **[SLIDE 4]** Jezebel, the princess of Sidon and Jezebel worshipped, with all of her heart, a false god known as Baal. Ahab, always the dutiful husband, made sure to go out of his way to build an entire temple dedicated to Baal, which not surprisingly, angered the true Lord God Almighty.

As we sort of familiarize ourselves with the context of the story here, I want you to think about **[SLIDE 5]** desperation. We just read about Jesus’ desperation on the Mount of Olives. He expressed a desperation to not have to go through with the Father’s plan. He wondered if there might be any other way. Here **[SLIDE 6]** King Ahab seems desperately bent on going the other way, of pursuing evil and ignoring God’s plan. Jezabel is desperate to get a strong Baal cult going in Israel. And God is desperate to see his people return to true worship! It’s been generations now, and king after deplorable king has continued to up the ante on disobedience. So, at this point, the people of Israel might not know it, but they are desperate for truth. They don’t know which way is up, or what god is real or how to conduct their lives. Everything is a jumble, their leaders have failed them and they have lost sight of the true God.

**[SLIDE 7]** Have you ever been desperate? Desperation is a result of circumstance. Maybe we don’t have enough of what we need. Maybe we are finding our surroundings to be overwhelming. Maybe we realize that this life is not ultimately within our hands, that we are not the ones in control. I remember feeling a sense of desperation when I was laid off from a church I worked at in Winona. **[SLIDE 8]** Even though I was an associate pastor at the time, my family and I lived in the church parsonage. Early one morning, the lead pastor, my boss, stopped by. It was strange to see him at our house. We almost always went to theirs. He had us sit down at the kitchen table and bluntly told my wife and I that I was done at the church. No great reason was given. We were shocked and more than a little angry. This news had come out of nowhere. My job was done immediately **[SLIDE 9]** – no two weeks or anything. But we were allowed to stay in the parsonage for a while until we could figure something out.

I had never been laid off before that point. If I was quitting a job, I had always had another one lined up. This was uncharted, and unwelcome territory. I had kids to feed, seminary to pay for and now a house to find…I was desperate. So I spruced up my resume and hit the internet. Surely there were plenty of companies looking to hire a guy who knows about the bible. What other marketable skills did I have? I was pastor…that’s what I could do. Needless to say, I applied to many churches, and I also tried to get work at a rental place, bookstores, as an editor, and anywhere else that was hiring. I started the process with a fair amount of confidence. But after a few weeks, I was getting **[SLIDE 10]** desperate. My pool of choices seemed shallow indeed.

We ended up moving in with my parents. My wife and I, our three kids at the time with one on the way. Back to my old bedroom with many of the same posters on the wall. We were certainly blessed by my mom and dad at the time. They were willing to help when we needed it, but I was growing more and more desperate. Finally, my wife and I drove up to **[SLIDE 11]** Forest Lake and interviewed with Pastor David Werner here at Forest Hills Church for a position as Children’s ministry director. That was 11 years ago. What a blessing to get to be a part of this church family. What a blessing to minister all these years with you all. But let me tell you, in my desperation, the Methodist church was not on my radar. Children’s ministry was not necessarily on my radar. And Forest Lake was not on the radar. But, in my time of desperation, God provided. Once offered, I took the job with gratitude, but at the time, it seemed a strange provision. It was not what I would have expected, but God tends to work that way.

**[SLIDE 12]** Here in 1 Kings 17 we are going to see characters who meet with desperation and we will also see the strange way that God provides. And, literally, without any introduction, we read about Elijah. (READ 17:1-7)

 With many introductions to characters, especially prophets, we are usually told who their father was. But here, he is simply **[SLIDE 13]** Elijah from Tishbe. He is also called a “settler” in Gilead which makes it sound like he was not a native. Many conclude that Elijah could have very well been a Gentile, someone who was not one of God’s chosen people. But whether or not he was born an Israelite, Elijah is committed to serving the God of Israel. He fearlessly marches up to King Ahab, the one currently sidetracked with all kinds of involvement with the false god Baal, and declares to the king’s face that there will be no rain for a number of years. Now we are not told what the conversation was that took place that day, but you can imagine a king who did evil would probably not hesitate to kill some upstart talking smack against Baal. And that is exactly what has happened here. **[SLIDE 14]** Baal was supposedly the god of the storm. Archaeologists have actually found images of Baal wielding lightning and riding on storm clouds. If you wanted good crops and fertility, you bowed before Baal. Elijah presents a very different understanding of how the world works. After doing so, he quickly becomes desperate to find safety from a rather angry king. Elijah is told by God to head east and hide out by the **[SLIDE 15]** Cherith Brook.

 Elijah finds the place. He drinks the water there and sure enough, as his stomach started growling, Elijah saw ravens flying in the sky and lighting upon nearby trees. He noticed that within their beaks, these birds were carrying chunks of bread **[SLIDE 16]** and pieces of meat. Maybe you have had the experience of going to the park and feeding the birds, but can you imagine being fed by them? Elijah got a full meal morning and evening from his feathered catering service. And, I should mention, at that time, eating meat twice a day was virtually unheard of unless you were royalty. Strange provisions from the God who could intercept Baal and stop the rain.

 Eventually, with no rain, the brook dried up and Elijah had to move on. God sent him to a new location, this time to a place outside of Isral’s bounds. Elijah was to head into the heart of Baal country. **[SLIDE 17]** (READ 17:8-9) Okay, so no more delivery from ravens, now a widow would provide for Elijah…a widow. Typically, widows were the poorest of the poor and this one would be grappling with a severe drought just like everyone else. A very strange provision indeed. (READ 17:10-12) Elijah sees this woman collecting sticks **[SLIDE 18]** for a meager fire so she can make one final meal for herself and her son. And with this drought on – what does Elijah ask for? “Please, get a little water for me.” And this woman helps him out! She demonstrates a kindness and hospitality well beyond her means, well beyond expectations. But Elijah goes too far when he asks for bread as well. She simply has none to give. She swears by Elijah’s God, she is in the works of preparing her last meal. A somber picture of desperation.

 (READ 17:13-14) Elijah reassures the woman but he also audaciously reaffirms his request for bread. Imagine this woman as she is out scrounging for a few sticks, she comes across this man who claims to serve Yahweh. “He wants water, he wants bread. Now, he wants to be served bread first! Oh, but he is very reassuring! Apparently if we feed him first, our flour and oil supply will not run out. Makes sense…” What would you do in that situation? You’d likely tell Elijah to move on, find another sucker. But this woman had reached another level of desperation. What did she have to lose? Maybe putting a little trust in Elijah’s God would be a wise move. (READ 17:15-16) So God provides. It’s a strange provision. Elijah is given sustenance by a widow at the desperate end of her rope, yet even in that place, she can muster up some faith. She chooses to sacrifice her last meal to this man and finds that what he said was right. Elijah’s God could provide. Despite drought, God made sure the oil would continue to flow and the flour would not run out.

 This is the step of faith made by a desperate woman who knows nothing about Elijah or the God he represents. She is a Baal worshipper. She knows about Baal. But she is desperate. And in her desperation, she turns to this unknown God. **[SLIDE 19]** Meanwhile, back in Isarel, the people do know about this God. In fact, they still worship him the problem is, they also worshipped all the other available gods as well. And, at the moment, Baal worship seems to be all the rage. The Israelites have not been made desperate enough. They function under the assumption that Baal provides rain and new life. Why not? Why worship one God when you could worship them all. The more the merrier! This is the talk of those who are well off, who have no real concerns in this life, who have not tasted desperation. Surely a drought will help keep the people’s wayward hearts in check. Surely then, they will see the failure of this so-called Baal.

 **[SLIDE 20]** But there is more to the story of this gentile widow. There is more that must be said and more that Elijah must do. But for now, we leave them. Though they live under the harsh conditions of a rainless sky, they are still able to enjoy the strange provision of Yahweh, the Almighty God, the living God, the only God, the God who provides.

 Food from a wild flock of ravens. Food from a lowly widow. God sustained Elijah with very strange provisions. When you’re desperate, you are willing to try anything. Remember, earlier, I mentioned that we would see a lot of desperation in this story? Remember, I mentioned that God was desperate for his people to return to him. He was desperate for them to repent. He was desperate to have his love for them returned in a real and free relationship. But, alas, the people were taken by idols. They were allured by the religious practices of the surrounding nations. They were caught up in lies. They were not desperate for the Lord their God. There were able to limp along just fine without him.

 How many of us are limping along? How many of us are trying to provide for ourselves? How many of us are desperate to be in right relationship with our good and gracious God who provides in strange ways? **[SLIDE 21]** Just like the Israelites, we live in a world full of distraction, full of opposing claims, full of false gods. It’s actually very easy for us to fall into idolatry. Of course, we don’t erect statues of gods or shrines to bow down to, but we may very well find ourselves living with priorities above God. This is idolatry all the same. And worshipping at the shrine of money or comfort or safety or security or -fill in the blank- keeps us from the desperation we ought to feel. Like fast food, our idols stave off our hunger so we never truly crave the real food God has for us, we never know his provision. We settle for what is quick and easy. We settle for what everyone else is eating. We settle for lies that sound good while the truth remains untouched. Over time we loose our taste for real food.

 God is desperate for us to know him. He sent his Son to die on a cross so that we could know him. He puts people in our paths and situations in our lives that could help us to know him, but maybe we are just not desperate enough. Maybe things seem well enough with Baal.

 I want to you to become desperate with me. I want us to be a church that understands that without God, we cannot go on. Without God, we cannot know his strange provisions, his miraculous movements, his joy-filled presence. Let us take a lesson from the Sidonian widow, a Baal worshipper who became desperate enough to take a step of faith and put her trust in the one true God, creator of heaven and earth. How do we do this? How do we take this crucial step? How did Jesus do it? He did it through **[SLIDE 22]** prayer.

 We turn to God in prayer. We demonstrate our desperation in prayer. We place our trust in God through prayer. We repent of our idol worship, our fast-food fix, through prayer. When we come to God in prayer, God’s desperation to be with us and our desperate need for him meet in a glorious miraculous provision. Come to the Lord in prayer…we all need him and it’s time we admit it. Join us here on Wednesday nights for an old-fashioned prayer meeting **[SLIDE 23]**. It’s a time where we express our desperation, and where we can receive from God his provision. God provides when hope is gone…so where do you place your hope? Let us come together and place it squarely where it belongs, at the feet of our God who has given us salvation through the death of his only son. That is maybe the strangest of all provisions. God has come as one of us, he entered into our weakness and need. He tasted our desperation, and he went to the cross so that we could live. Life through death is a strange provision indeed, one we get to partake of together here and now. And we thank God for meeting us in our moments of desperation. Amen.