

**When God Visits God's People, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 02070610**  
**Galatians 1:11-24 and 1 Kings 17:18-24**  
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Elijah is one of the most colorful personalities in the Bible. The stories about him show how he was sustained by God, how he stood up against the powers of corruption and evil in government, and today we will see how Elijah served as God's instrument in healing. "Elijah the Tishbite,"<sup>1</sup> says a lot of things. "Elijah" means literally, "*Jah is El*" in Hebrew: "Jahweh is high God." His very name was the proclamation of his message. "*Tishbite*" means he came from Tishbe in Gilead, on the far side of the Jordan.

Israel was divided now, after the reigns of the great monarchs Saul, David, and Solomon. Ahab was one of the more powerful kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Ahab's wife was Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and priest of Baal. Jezebel brought her religion, the worship of Baal with her to the Northern Kingdom, and into the king's palace. Jahwism, the worship of our God, "Jahweh," was in great danger. In 1 Kings 16:33 the historian says, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him."

There was famine in the land. Elijah was told by God to go Zarephath in Sidon and live with a widow who had a son. Because of the drought, the woman had lost hope. She was going to make her last meal, telling the prophet, "I go to prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."<sup>2</sup>

Elijah responded, "Go ahead, but before you do, make some for me." Then he said, quoting the God of Israel, "The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth." And so it happened. The meal and oil did not run out for a long time. Then the son became ill and stopped breathing.

Imagine the emotional roller coaster this woman was on. First, she lost her husband. Then came the drought. She thought she was going to starve to death. Next, she was saved from that. Now, this strange man of God was in her home and her son was near death. Her statement revealed the belief that her sin caused the sickness of her son.

This line of thinking is not uncommon. Sometimes we think our sin or wrongdoing brings punishment from God. We had a neighbor in Rochester, New York named Sue who was Greek Orthodox. She had a phrase she would utter when someone had tragedy happen to them: "O God forgive him," as though tragedy was the result of guilt; as though if the person had been forgiven, the calamity would not have happened! If God's visits to us bring calamity and death, then we don't want God to visit us.

Our daughter Maggie lost a friend named Cheryl when she was in fifth grade. This was the first we had ever heard of a peanut allergy. Cheryl died while her class was on an outing. It is a tragedy when anyone dies, but it is most tragic when a child dies. Gone are the dreams of potential: the hopes for marriage, family, or career. This girl might have been a singer, and artist, or a teacher. Those dreams gone.

It is normal to react with "What did I do to cause this?--What could I have done to prevent it?" The parents have a lot of work to do to go on living with the empty place at the dinner table

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<sup>1</sup>1 Kings 17:1

<sup>2</sup>1 Kings 17:12

and making the best of life for their other children. Most parents would give up their own lives rather than have their children die.

This boy of Zarapheth was near death or dead. God visited him through Elijah and he was restored to life. The widow praised God. Elijah was God's instrument, miraculously bringing nourishment when she was hungry and bringing life when there was death.

When God visits, what happens? Does God bring suffering and death? God visited Paul. You heard Paul's testimony. He had persecuted the early followers of Christ, viciously trying to stamp out this threat to the traditions of faith. God visited Paul and made him an apostle, a teacher of the very way he had persecuted. Paul said his hearers "glorified God because of me."<sup>3</sup> Paul did more to spread Christianity than anyone else in history.

When God visits, God brings hope. The drought-starved woman of Zarapheth was going to die. She had given up. Through Elijah, God gave her hope. Psalm 113 says, "God lifts the needy from the ash heap!"<sup>4</sup> I love that image! How often do we feel like we are sitting on the ash heap of life? God lifts the needy from ash heap— not only the financially needy, but also the spiritually needy. There have been times I have felt I was there on ash heap. Try as hard as I might, I could not right the situation. I would work harder, but that just dug me deeper into the ash heap. Perhaps it is my imagination, but when I became honest with myself and said, "God, that's it, I can't do anymore, I give up," that is when things got better.

Tragedy is not evidence of God's visit. Little Cheryl's death did not happen because God visited her. The change because of the tragedy, the growth that occurs, is evidence that God has visited and given new life out of the death. Cheryl died and God's visit took her to eternal life. God's visit comforts and strengthens those who miss her.

When God visits us, there can be powerful changes in our lives. We are dead in some aspects of our Christian walk today. Think for a moment about the ways in which you are dead or at least sitting on a spiritual ash heap. Do you wonder if loving others is really worth it when you only seem to get hurt when you love others? Are you tired of serving on a committee at church? Do you doubt that God listens to prayer? The Christian life is a series of deaths and resurrections. Sometimes God comforts and consoles. Sometimes God stirs us out of our complacency. Sometimes God gives clarity and resolution. God brings life out of death and God can make us apostles.

Our Scripture stories today show that as a result of people's being raised to new life, other people are brought to the faith. Paul's is a symbolic death and being raised to new life. He died to his role as persecutor. He was raised to new life as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul was an apostle because God made him an apostle and not because people did. People glorify God not because of Paul, but because God changed Paul. It is not the people who are raised to life who are important in these stories, but those around them.

When God visits people, there can be such obvious change in their lives that those around them end up praising God.

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<sup>3</sup>Galatians 1:24

<sup>4</sup>Psalm 113:7