

## **THE BREAD OF HEAVEN**

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*Lessons: I Kings 17:1-16; Arcana Coelestia 9198:6,7*

We have just read a story about Elijah, the prophet of the Lord. First we read about how he was fed with bread and meat by ravens, and how he drank from a brook. Then a great famine came upon the land.

For weeks and weeks, no rain fell and no dew refreshed the wheat and fruit and vegetables at night. The sun shone down hot and bright, and dried up all the rivers and brooks. It shriveled the leaves on the trees, and burned up the plants. The animals were thin and weak from lack of food, and many of them died. Underfoot the ground cracked and crumbled into fine dust, which blew with the wind, and choked up people's noses and throats. Starving and thirsty, people used up their small savings of food and water, and then they lay down and died, often beside their useless plows and hoes.

During this time, Elijah received food from the ravens and water from the brook. But at last the ravens couldn't find any more food, and the brook dried up. So the Lord commanded Elijah to go down to Zarephath, saying that he would find a widow woman there who would feed him.

Elijah went to Zaraphath, and when he arrived, he saw a widow woman gathering sticks. She was going to use these to cook up the small amount of flour and oil which she had left for herself and her son. After this they would both die, because there was no more food.

Elijah asked her for a drink of water and for some of the food she had. At first, she did not want to give him any of her little bit of food. But finally she went and cooked him a little cake with some oil, and gave him some water. And then the miracle happened! She found that her jar still had oil in it and that her bin still had flour in it! And the jar and the bin continued to have oil and flour in them, so that the widow and her son and Elijah lived for many days on what was in the jars, until the famine was over.

Now this famine happened because King Ahab and the children of Israel had turned away from the Lord and were disobeying His commandments and worshipping false gods. But the Lord did not send the famine just to punish them. He knew that the children of Israel would be conquered and killed by the other nations whose false gods they worshiped unless they turned again to Him. And so, when the famine was so great that they were willing to finally ask Him for help, then He gave them food and water once more.

The same thing happened many times to the children of Israel, and the Lord brought always them back to Him by sending a famine upon them. Do you remember that when the children of Israel had rebelled against the Lord in the wilderness, they finally asked for help, and the Lord sent them manna?

The Lord also fed people through miracles several times while He was on earth. You may remember how he fed five thousand people who had come to hear Him speak with only a few loaves of bread and fishes. There was more food left over after the five thousand people had eaten than there had been to start with. Another time, when the disciples could not catch any fish to eat, the Lord told them to cast the net on the right side of the ship, and when they did so, they caught many fish.

The reason why all these people—the children of Israel, the disciples, the crowds who followed the Lord—were fed by Him, was because they all really wanted to be fed. They were hungry, and they knew that only the Lord could feed them.

Now there are two ways in which the Lord feeds all of us. The first way is by providing the meat, the wheat, the vegetables and the fruits, which we need. These give us the power to live and the ability to do things. But there is another way in which the Lord feeds us. While on earth, the Lord told His disciples, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27). He also said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). And the Lord also declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

“He who comes to Me shall never hunger.” When the children of Israel came to the Lord, when the disciples came to Him, when the multitudes came, He fed them. He not only fed them with natural food, He also gave them spiritual food. He gave them the words that proceeded out of the mouth of God—the words that He Himself spoke. He gave them the meat of everlasting life.

The food of everlasting life is contained in His Word. This food nourishes our minds and hearts and so strengthens them. It is only in the Lord’s Word that we find that bread which is the “staff of life.” Only there can we find the food that will give us the strength and energy to do what the Lord wants us to do.

But there is another way in which the Lord gives us the bread of heaven—in the delight we feel in doing good. The bread of heaven gives us joy when we do some good deed for our companions or teachers or parents. It tastes good! It gives us a fine feeling when we sacrifice one of our own pleasures so that someone else may have some fun and enjoyment. It gives us a glow of pleasure when we go to the Lord’s Word and are given heavenly food. This is the “bread

of heaven” which the Lord says that He is, for He is the only one who can give it to us. And He does give it to us freely whenever He can, that is, whenever we are willing to receive it.

Amen.