

# PM 1 Kings 17:7-24 The God of Provision

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[ 0 : 00 ] In 1st Kings chapter 17, reading from verse 7.

Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, that's Elijah, go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there.

I have instructed a widow there to supply you with food. So he went to Zarephath and when he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks.

He called to her and asked, would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink? As she was going to get it, he called, and bring me please a piece of bread. Surely as the Lord your God lives, she replied, I don't have any bread.

Only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I'm gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.

[ 1 : 11 ] Elijah said to her, don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me.

And then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Sometime later, the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, what do you have against me, man of God?

Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son? Give me your son, Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his bed.

[ 2 : 25 ] Then he cried out to the Lord, Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with by causing her son to die. Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him.

The Lord heard Elijah's cry and the boy's life returned to him and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, look, your son is alive.

Then the woman said to Elijah, now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth. Amen and may God add his blessing.

Together from 1 Kings 17 and the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. And the overarching theme of course of that whole chapter is the provision of God, which is a theme that is always worth our dwelling upon and reflecting on.

It's how our Father God graciously provides for his children. This morning we looked at the opening verses where Elijah first of all confronts the evil king Ahab and tells him that God's judgment is going to come upon the land in the form of a drought.

[ 3 : 56 ] And God then tells Elijah to go to the brook Kerith where God will provide for him. And then after a while the brook dries up and Elijah is told to go to this widow of Zarephath.

This morning we saw how Elijah was given divine guidance, how he was brought under the training and the schooling of God and how God provided for him.

And so we come to this next sort of episode in the chapter. The brook dries up and God is going to lead him on into the next stage of his life.

And for Elijah, life was an ever-changing canvas. We can think of him before he is called on to the public stage as it were, enjoying the pastoral peace of Gilead.

Then there was the exacting ordeal of having to go and confront this evil king, which wouldn't have been an easy thing to do, but to go and confront King Ahab and tell him of God's judgment of the drought that was going to come upon the land.

[ 5 : 16 ] And then following that drama of his confrontation with Ahab, there is the solitude of Kerith, where God provides for him.

And now we find he's going to move on to Zarephath and Sidon and to the troubles that he will find there. It's worth trying to get into our minds the picture of Elijah at Kerith.

As day by day that brook got less and less. Did his hopes and trust in God dwindle with the brook? Did he give himself to any anxious pacing up and down?

Well, there's nothing to suggest that. Elijah had a simple trust in the God who was there and was confident that God would not let him down. And so at the needed hour, as the brook dried up, fresh grace came to Elijah from the Lord.

And the fresh provision was a new word of guidance. In verse 8, Then the word of the Lord came to him. Then the word of the Lord came to him.

[ 6 : 32 ] How often does it come to us? Directly in our hearts as we read scripture or through the preaching of his word.

Scripture, interestingly, is full of examples of those who heard the word of God and refused to accept it. In Jeremiah 44 verse 16, we find the people of God.

And we need to remember, this is not the heathen outsider. This is the people of God. Jeremiah 44 verse 16 saying, We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord.

We will not listen. In Ezekiel 33 verse 31, My people come to you as they usually do and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice.

With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed to them you are nothing more than one who sings, loves songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words, but do not put them into practice.

[ 7 : 52 ] Hear your words, and don't put them into practice. And that perhaps makes us think of that parable at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the rock and the sand, and the man who built his house and the sand, and the man who built his house upon the rock.

And Jesus says, The man who built his house on the sand is like the person who listens to me, who hears my words, and does nothing about them. The man who built his house upon the rock, which endures the storm, is like the man who hears my word, and puts it into practice.

Well that's all still a reality today. There can be much hearing of the word of God, but sometimes little joyful compliance to it.

And I've had a real sense that the challenge of Elijah to us is simply, will we live in obedience to the word of God? Elijah did. Elijah said, Go and confront Ahab.

Elijah did that. God said to Elijah, Go to the brook Kerith. He did that. God said, Go to the widow of Zarephath. And Elijah did that.

[ 9 : 09 ] So Elijah is told to go to Zarephath. And Zarephath, root meaning, means refining. And we see the character of Elijah being refined as we go through his story.

And Kerith to Zarephath was around 75 miles across fairly desolate countryside. And Zarephath was interestingly in Sidon.

And there's actually a sort of neat ironic twist there. King Ahab had married Jezebel and made her his queen. And if Ahab was bad, then Jezebel was probably even worse.

And later on we find Jezebel threatening to kill Elijah. And Elijah fleeing into the desert to escape from Jezebel.

Well, Jezebel came from the area of Sidon. And now God is going to hide from Ahab's forces who are out scouring the land looking for Elijah.

[ 10 : 22 ] Trying to find him. Because Ahab wants Elijah. And he wants him to kill him. And God hides him first of all at Kerith but now he hides him in Zarephath and Sidon.

And the irony of that being this is where Jezebel had come from. Well, there's three sort of focal points in the passage. There's the widow, of course. There's Elijah himself and the Lord.

And I want to just briefly look at each of these in turn. And first of all consider the widow's unrelieved distress. This lady to whom Elijah is sent does not have her troubles to seek.

She's lost her husband. She has probably with that lost her status in society. And she has undoubtedly fallen in hard times.

In verse 12 we read that she has come to the end of her resources. As surely as the Lord your God lives, she replied, I don't have any bread. Only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. [ 11 : 35 ] And I'm gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die. And it's here at the end of her resources, at the end of hope, that she finds the gracious hand of the Lord.

She's not passive altogether, she does respond positively to what Elijah asks of her. But as Elijah came down that road to meet her, she was at the end of her tether.

She had lost all hope. And that should perhaps speak to us. If we pin our hope or our faith on the material things of life, then we will ultimately lose all hope.

Hope and faith, if they are to hold up, have to be focused in the eternal, in the grace of God, and in the cross of Christ. And so this widow experiences the grace of God as Elijah comes to stay with her.

Together they experience this wonderful provision of God. Verse 15, she went away and did as Elijah had told her. And so there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

[ 12 : 55 ] For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah. And we can just imagine something of the emotions of this woman.

There she had, she'd be out to gather a few sticks to bake this last meal and then that was it as far as she thought. But now Elijah has appeared, come into her life and with him the gracious provision of the Lord.

And that must have been a thrill for her. The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry. Just try and imagine yourself in her situation.

And what a thrill would be in your heart as each day you got up and the flour was there and the oil was there. But then life doesn't run smoothly it perhaps seldom does.

In verse 17, sometime later the son of the woman became ill and he grew worse and worse and finally stopped breathing. And that was obviously a severe trial to whatever faith she had.

[ 14 : 11 ] A trial we could imagine brought about by God to bring her to a real and living faith. And at the end of the passage we have the woman's declaration of faith.

But before that there comes a collapse of faith. In verse 18, she said to Elijah, what do you have against me man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?

Now, of course, God's going to restore the son, but at this point faith, her faith has taken a nosedive. And folk can be prone to collapses of faith, especially if we get the fulcrum of our lives wrong.

The widow was bound to the things of this life and faith collapsed. But Elijah's faith led him to the throne of grace and to the God of grace. And so the son was restored to her.

So we have this widow woman going through the despair of life and then the hope and all the joy that that presumably brought into her life.

[ 15 : 25 ] Then into the depths of despair again when her son dies and so on. And over against the widow woman's unrelieved distress, we find the prophet's undaunted faith.

So let's start part of the widow for a moment and look at the incident from Elijah's point of view.

Here he is, a mighty prophet of God, and he is made dependent on a Gentile in a heathen city.

And that couldn't have been easy for a Jew. And so here undoubtedly for Elijah were fresh lessons in humility. Not only does help come from a woman, but from a poor widow at that.

He is called to receive the charity of a desolate widow who is at the end of her tether. But Elijah wasn't discouraged by what appeared an unpromising situation.

It appears that he might have been dark and dismal, but his eye of faith could pierce the black clouds and see above them the smiling face of the God who provided.

[ 16 : 37 ] And clearly Elijah has the confidence that God has provided at the brook Kerith, so he's going to provide this widow woman in Zarephath. And clearly Elijah had the faith and the confidence to take God at his word.

Verse 8 following, we read, the word of the Lord came to him, go to Zarephath and stay there, I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food. I've commanded this woman to supply you with food.

The woman tells him the food's run out, but Elijah has confidence that God would continue to supply. And so Elijah makes an unusual request in a sense in verse 13.

Elijah said to her, don't be afraid, go home and do as you have said, but first make a small cake of bread for me and from what you have and bring it to me and then make something for yourself. Now, on the surface that seems maybe a bit strange. Elijah comes to this lady and he says, me first. think of it.

[ 17 : 52 ] Here's this poor woman with enough warning for herself and her boy and Elijah says, make something for me first before you make something for yourself and your son.

It sounds dreadfully selfish, doesn't it? but on the other hand, Elijah was a prophet of the Lord and as God's representative, he was saying in effect to this woman that in all things God must have first place and that of course is a great principle that Jesus sums up in the Sermon on the Mount. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and then all these other things will be added to you as well. But the other things are secondary.

It's seek God and his kingdom first. Not please note a matter of putting the church first in our lives, not a question of putting religious service first in our lives, not a question of putting good works first in our lives, but of putting God first.

A matter of being jealous for his name and his glory and his kingdom. it's worth noting that Elijah's request to the woman is coupled to a promise and Elijah here reveals his faithfulness to God and God's provision.

[ 19 : 32 ] Verse 14 he says, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.

God had said to Elijah that he would provide for him at this widow in Zarephath. Verse 9, go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and say there, I have commanded a widow woman to supply you with food. And Elijah clearly clings on to that promise of God and acts on the basis of it as not just of, yeah okay, I agree to the promise.

He lives it out in the things that he does. Now it's no doubt easy to leave the story of God's dealings with Elijah and the widow in the pages of history but we mustn't do that.

We must always seek to apply scripture to our own lives. The word of God comes to Elijah and he obeys. That applies today.

[ 20 : 41 ] The word of God comes to us. Do we obey? Or do we hear and not act on it? And then there's the promise of God.

It's great to tick off as it were the promises of God but the real number of it is do we live in the light of the promises day by day? Elijah had the promise that God would provide for him and he went to Kareth and the basis of that promise and he had the promise of God that this widow woman would supply him with food and he goes forth and acts on the basis of that.

It's a question of a practical moment by moment living on the basis of God's promises. And so in the chapter we see something of the widow's unrelieved distress, falling in hard times, our son dying. We see the prophet's undaunted faith clinging to the promises of God. And lastly we see something in the chapter of the Lord's unfailing supply.

A couple of verses from the New Testament Philippians 4 and 19. My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

[ 22 : 08 ] And in Matthew 6 and verse 8. Do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him. Do not be like them.

That's the people around who have no thought for God. your father knows what you need before you ask him. We need to see what a great God we have.

He promises to supply Elijah's needs and supply them he will. Might not be the way that Elijah would have worked it out. It will sell them. If ever be the way we would work it out ourselves.

But if we live humbly and obedience before the Lord, he will provide for our needs. obedience. And I think it's important to note the little word there in verse 4 and in verse 9.

God says go to the book Kareth and I will feed you there. It was only as Elijah went forth in obedience that he entered into the provision of God.

[ 23 : 22 ] And the same here, verse 9, go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food. You will know my provision, says God to Elijah, there and in that place, nowhere else.

And that was a condition of the promise. Some of God's promises in scripture are unconditional, but a lot of his promises have a condition and that was a condition here that Elijah go forth in obedience.

We all have emotional, psychological needs. We all have undoubtedly spiritual needs of the soul. And God will meet these needs as we walk in his ways.

And when we so walk, there is an adequacy of God's supply. In verse 15 of chapter 17, the woman went away and did as Elijah had told her.

And so there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. That well-known Psalm 23 tells us, the Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

[ 24 : 44 ] And then later in the Psalm, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. And that became a practical reality for Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, as the God prepared a table for them in that place.

And so this woman knew the Lord's blessing, even as she passed through the trials and tribulations of life. So in this chapter we see something of this widow's unrelieved distress, like so many, knowing lots of suffering and trials in her life, but also discovering the gracious hand of God.

And we see more of Elijah's undaunted faith as he goes forth on the basis of God's command and promises. And we see how God fulfills his promises and provides for his children.

The chapter is dominated, I would suggest to you, not by the plight of the widow, nor by the actions of Elijah, but the overarching theme is surely the guidance and the provision of the Lord.

And as we come to a close, let me read a passage from Isaiah 58. The Lord will guide you always.

[ 26 : 18 ] He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

The Lord will guide you always. He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. If we walk in the light of the path that God says before us, then we enter into the riches of his provision.

If we lay hold of his promises and his guidance, which always comes to us through his word, then we will know his blessing. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for the way in which you led and guided your servant Elijah.

first to go and confront Ahab and then to the shelter of Kereth and then on to the widow of Zarephath. We thank you for his faithfulness to your word, living in obedience to it, and we pray that you would help us to acquaint ourselves with your word and seek to put it into practice in our lives day by day.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.