

AM 1 Kings 17:1-6 The God of Provision

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[0 : 0 0] at verse 25. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, Rabbi, when did you get here?

Jesus answered, very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

For in him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Then they asked him, what must we do to do the works God requires? Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

So they asked him, what sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Jesus said to them, very truly, I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

[1 : 1 6] Sir, they said, give us this bread. Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me. Amen.

And may God add his blessing to the reading of his word. Our Heavenly Father, as we bow in your presence, we ask that your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. We look around us at the world today and are often dismayed by the bankruptcy of the people of God.

[2 : 2 9] All too often the church seems to fall over backward to conform to the world around us. And the moral standards of the Bible might be quite clear, but our modern world, at least in our society, is set against that.

And so the church in too many instances abandons biblical principles and embraces the views of a secular world. And I suppose there's nothing new about this because that's the sort of background we find in the story of Elijah.

The background to the story of Elijah is the bankruptcy of the people of God. And it's summed up in chapter 16 of 1 Kings, verse 30, where we're told that Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.

And that verse is simply expressive of a general slide away from God that we read of in 1 Kings from chapter 12 through chapter 16.

We're told of different kings that came to lead the people of God and how they strayed from God until we are summed up with Ahab, who apparently did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.

[4 : 07] And it's simply the story of the people of God embracing the values of the godless cultures around them. And into that situation, God sends Elijah.

I first became fascinated with Elijah probably about 60 odd years ago. I was brought up in a church which had a choir that did a three year cycle.

They did Handel's Messiah, Haydn's Creation, and Mendelsohn's Elijah, these oratoria. And they just did them in a three year cycle.

And I was listening to them giving this performance of Elijah as a teenager that brought me into reading the story of Elijah in scripture and other books about this prophet in the Old Testament.

Elijah just bursts in the scene with sudden drama. And with extraordinary boldness, if you think about it. Here it is this man called by God to face the evil hour of God's people having drifted further and further away.

[5 : 29] And Elijah comes on the scene filled with righteous indignation. I need to try and picture this rugged highlander from Gilead.

Suddenly confronting King Ahab. And there's no mincing of words, is there? Verse 1 of chapter 17. Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe and Gilead said to Ahab, As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dune or rain in the next few years except at my word.

And so Elijah comes bringing a word, a word of judgment upon a nation because they have strayed from the Lord.

And I think there's a great similarity between the days of Elijah and our dates. Apparently in Scotland today there are less than 2% evangelical Christians which according to those who study these things puts Scotland into the category of un-evangelized mission fields.

Which is quite a thought. this land that sent people around the world with the gospel. It was a Scot who was the first to translate the Bible into Chinese.

[7 : 03] The first to translate the Bible into Korean. The first to translate umpteen languages in Africa for the Bible. I remember a friend of mine coming back from a conference in England and he had met a couple of folk from Africa and they embraced him and said oh you're you're from Scotland you're from the land of the book.

And he thought how sad because that certainly is not true today. It might have been true in the past but not today. And so it seems to me that the background of Elijah's ministry is relevant to us today.

I remember some 35 years ago and I was a member of Hamilton Presbytery of the Church of Scotland and I remember the Presbytery passing a motion asking the moderator of the General Assembly to seek with other church leaders to institute a national day of prayer and repentance for the nation.

such was the moral and spiritual state of our nation 35 years ago. In the years since then it would be fair to say that we have plunged further into godlessness.

Since then Sunday as a special day has been officially abolished. When I started my ministry schools would not have dreamt of doing anything on a Sunday to compete with the churches.

[8 : 47] That's most certainly not the case nowadays. Drugs and pornography have become more widespread. The chapters leading up to 1 Kings 17 and Elijah tell a sad and sorry tale of a people of God that have drifted further and further away from the Lord.

And so Elijah confronts Ahab with this pronouncement of God's judgement a drought. But as we progress into the chapter the mood changes and it does so dramatically from the anger and judgement of God upon a corrupt society to God's mercy and provision for his children.

And while the chapter begins with Elijah pronouncing God's judgement the overall thrust of this chapter of chapter 17 is that of an all providing God who provides for his people evil.

And there are two main scenes. First at the brook Kerith which is a rural hideout for Elijah and second at Zarephath where there is a world of suffering and of sorrow.

And in these two quite different settings we need of God's provision for his servant. And in a way these two scenes mirror life. times of rural tranquility and refreshment.

[10 : 24] Times of stress and trouble. And in them we learn of God's provision of daily needs. And in them we see also God preparing Elijah for future service.

Elijah appears and announces to Ahab that there is going to be a drought. And surely Elijah has in mind God's word from way back in Deuteronomy 11 verse 16.

Because there we read be careful or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Which of course is what the nation had been doing.

Then the Lord's anger will burn against you and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord has given you.

And it's safe to assume that Elijah knew this passage of scripture and as he is confronting Ahab he's claiming this word of God and announcing that it will not rain.

[11 : 51] So then here we have Elijah confronting Ahab and witnessing a good confession. As the Lord the God of Israel lives whom I serve there will be neither rain nor dew in the next few years except at my word.

Of course the absence of rain was particularly opposite because if we read the story we find one of the ways in which the nation had strayed was that Ahab had introduced the worship of the Baals.

And the Baals were the gods of some of the surrounding cultures and they were gods of fertility and of rain clouds.

The Baals that Ahab had introduced the gods of the rain clouds and Elijah's word from God is that it will not rain.

And of course that took courage for Elijah to do that, to go in and confront Ahab. And I think there's many things we see in these verses.

[13 : 04] And the first I would draw your attention to is the obedience of Elijah. God spoke to Elijah and Elijah did what God said.

God told Elijah to go and confront Ahab. Then in verse 2 we're told the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith ravine.

it's been said that the story of Elijah revolves around obedience to God's word. Go and confront Ahab.

Elijah does it. Go and hide at the brook Kerith. And Elijah does that. And then as we go into chapter 18 we find that God comes to Elijah and says, go and confront Ahab again.

Go show yourself to Ahab and provoke a showdown. That's how chapter 18 begins. God speaks. The question is, will the servant obey?

[14 : 13] And that's ever contemporary. And we remind ourselves here that the guidance of God comes primarily through his word.

the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Not dreams, not mysterious revelations, but through God's word.

Over my years in the ministry I've always found it disturbing how people have said that God's been leading them to do this, that and the next thing which has been quite outrageous.

And when you bring them back to the Bible, they don't want to know what the Bible is saying. They want to follow their feeling, the way they think things should be done.

God guides through his word. Often we may wish scripture said something else or something more or something less than it does, but it's there and it's the word of God and we need to learn to walk in it.

[15 : 29] Isaiah 30 verse 21, whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, this is the way, walk in it.

This is the way, walk in it. And Elijah does that, the word of the Lord comes to him, confronts Ahab, the word of the Lord comes to him, he goes to Kareth.

Later in the chapter the word of the Lord comes to him, go to this widow woman at Zarephath and he does that. We need to note that God does not map out all his plans for Elijah.

He doesn't come to him and say, look, I want you to go to Kareth and then after a wee while there I'm going to tell you to go to somewhere else. Elijah simply needs to obey God in the moment and he does that.

We need to learn to trust and obey God for the moment. God is not necessarily going to give answers to all our questions. He waits until we are obedient in one place before leading to the next.

[16 : 44] He leads, we follow. And in that following Elijah finds rest and restoration.

Psalms 23 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. And that's precisely what the Lord was doing with Elijah when he told him to go to the brook Kareth.

And we need to bear in mind that God's guidance can sometimes run contrary to human understanding. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight. God's guidance contrary to human understanding. Two missionary examples both Hudson Taylor the great missionary to China and Gladys Aylward also China when they applied to the mission boards that they thought would send them to China they were turned down.

Lean not on your own understanding but in God's word. And they knew that the Lord was calling them to China. Well back to Elijah think of this situation here is Elijah he has confronted Ahab what might our response have been what was needed the nation was in a terrible state what was needed a preaching tour by Elijah to go around proclaiming the word of God calling the nation to repentance well no God simply calls him to the quiet solitude of Kareth and the command he received and he obeyed and coupled to the command he was given was a promise verse 3 and 4 leave here turn eastward and hide in the

[19 : 00] Kareth ravine east of the Jordan you will drink from the brook and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there first the command then the promise and the promise is like the command clear and specific the promise you will drink I have ordered the ravens to feed you but note that the promise is a conditional one there I have ordered the ravens to feed you there not somewhere else which leaves the question for us are you there in the centre of God's will and so we see this wonderful obedience of Elijah verse 5 so he did what the Lord had told him he went to Kareth Ravine east of the Jordan and stayed there so he did he did what God said in

John 14 at the last supper Jesus says in John 14 15 if you love me you will obey what I command the final test for our love for the Lord is our obedience and though that we were as prompt to obey as Elijah was and so we find God providing for his servant at the brook Kerith and we can ask ourselves why did God take Elijah out of the situation a prophet's job at the end of the day was surely to be about the business of proclaiming the word of God and that's true but at this moment God was in his eternal wisdom making the provision for Elijah that was going to enable him to go on proclaiming that word in the years that lay ahead why did

God take Elijah out of the situation and I think we can posit a number of answers to that question and the first would be to guard when reaction set in Elijah has been through a great deal he's clearly laid hold of God's promise concerning the sending of drought if the people are rebellious we can safely assume that he has prayed and seen the rain clouds not producing any rain and in the strength of that he has gone and confronted Ahab and we read that in the Bible we can sometimes bounce over things like that that was extraordinarily courageous it wasn't an easy occupation back in these days confronting kings you are liable to have your head lopped off without any further notice but

Elijah walking in God's will delivers God's word to this evil king and it must have been a nerve jangling if rewarding experience for Elijah but after that the danger of reaction setting in the reaction to the stress and success of that moment of service to God after the hilltop experience of your life of confronting Ahab there was the danger of the valley bottom life's high points are followed by lows always I used to go in younger days on summer mission and you would have lots of folk would go but they went to summer mission and they had all the highs of summer mission and meeting folk and folk coming to know the

Lord and they would go back to the churches and were good for nothing a reaction set in and so God is providing for Elijah Elijah's need was to be alone with his God so that his character could be further honed and refined and so God leads him into quietness and solitude and perhaps that speaks eloquently to us in an age which lives and wall to wall noise Isaiah 30 15 in repentance and rest is your salvation in quietness and trust is your strength but you would have none of it today people are so busy few endure solitude sometimes the problem in a church can be frenzied activity so busy doing

[24 : 25] God's work that they have no time for God Psalm 23 verse 2 he makes me lie down in green pastures he leads me beside still waters he restores my soul he leads me beside still waters he restores my soul that was what was happening to Elijah at Kerith and we need these periods of quietness and stillness and restoration as well so Elijah was taken by God to the brook Kerith to guard against reaction and secondly to prepare him for further service because Kerith was a learning place for Elijah it wasn't just quiet rest it was about teaching lessons of humility and dependence of patience and trust and think of the tasting that he endured there as the brook slowly got less and less as it dried up the brook that was the provision of God fading away to a trickle and then drying up 1st

Kings chapter 17 verse 6 the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening and he drank from the brook but sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land did Elijah feel let down as that brook dried up surely he was being taught by the Lord to trust in the Lord the giver of gifts and not in the gifts themselves trials might ask why do trials and testings come upon us doesn't God care of course he does but he knows what he is doing and he knew what he was planning for Elijah he knows what he is planning for us as he leads us onwards did Elijah grow anxious as that brook got less and less did he become gloomy and depressed did he wonder if

God had forgotten him did he question God's guidance I think we can assume that he was learning to depend on God and so it is with us our brooks can dry up the testings of life can come upon us the drying brook of popularity of failing health of diminishing business of church decline why does God suffer the brook to dry up surely to teach us to trust in him and not in his gifts there is a great danger sometimes in becoming preoccupied with what God provides rather than the provider namely God a verse back in Deuteronomy 32 where we are told that Jeshurun grew fat and kicked and filled with food he became heavy and sleek and he abandoned the God who made him and rejected the raucous saviour prosperity leading to this individual turning away from God and that tendency can still be there today

God warned the people of God again and again in Deuteronomy to be careful not to forget him when they entered into the land and enjoyed all the abundance of what God had provided for them and so it seems to be at Kerith that Elijah was being prepared for future service his character being honed and refined by God he was being made a deeper person as he learned the lessons of humility and dependence and trust so why Kerith to guard when reaction set in to prepare Elijah for further service and also perhaps to prepare a nation in times of apostasy God often withdraws his word and in taking Elijah out of the situation God was taking his word as it were out of the life of the nation in Amos 8 and 11 we read the days are coming declares the suffering

Lord when I will send a famine through the land not a famine of food or a thirst for water but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east searching for the word of the Lord but they will not find it and such was the case here with Elijah and that's true of our own history in Scotland in times in our history when Scotland has been dry when few voices have stood up and said thus says the Lord and perhaps if there is any hope for our land today it is in the recovery of biblical ministries growing pockets up and down the land of people hungry for the word of the Lord well we see something in these short verses at the beginning of 1st

[30 : 34] Kings 17 of the obedience of Elijah a man determined to walk in God's will which leaves us with the question am I in the place that God assigns me we've seen how God provides for Elijah the brook Kareth guarding against reaction preparing him for future service as he the Lord provided for Elijah's physical needs so he also provided at a much deeper spiritual level as Elijah was prepared for the events that lay ahead and Jesus said in that passage we read in John's Gospel do not labour for the food that spoils but for the food the bread that endures to eternal life God provides that to me is the overarching theme of these verses they're not really about

Elijah at all they're about a loving God a providing God who despite the apostasy of the nation was still in charge and that should lead us as we seek to live in our day faithful to God to know something of a tranquillity of soul that Elijah was brought to at the brook Kereth let us pray father we thank you for this man Elijah prepare to leave his background and go and confront Ahab and then to know your hand upon him you spoke to him and he did what you said may you speak to us and may we do what you say in

Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you.