

Elijah By The Brook Cherith

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to 1st Kings and we're going to read in chapter 17.

1st Kings and chapter 17 at the beginning. And Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years except at my word.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Get away from here and turn eastward and hide by the brook Kareth which flows into the Jordan.

And it will be that you shall drink from the brook. I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.

So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the brook Kareth which flows into the Jordan.

The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. And he drank from the brook.

[1 : 28] And it happened after a while that the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. We want to look at particularly verses 2 to 7 here in this passage.

Simply to think about Elijah by the brook Kareth. And what was told to him to do and how the Lord provided for him and the lessons that he learned there.

Now I think it's worth maybe just trying to put this in an historical context and remind you that when we say Ahab was king, Ahab was king of Israel, that is the ten northern tribes.

And Ahaz, or Asa I should say, King Asa was king in Judah. And Asa had reigned about 38 years at the time of Ahab's reign.

So we've got a date of around 871 BC. This is the period in which you've got the prophet Elijah as a prophet to Israel.

[2 : 48] That is to the northern tribes. And what we find here is that the problem for Elijah was that he felt very much alone.

He felt very much on his own. We remember a little later on he complained to the Lord that everyone else had forsaken the Lord and that he alone was left.

And this incident that comes before that great triumph on Mount Carmel is again a situation in which Elijah has carried off to be very much on his own.

And that is in a sense a contradiction of what it is to belong to the Lord and to be a follower of the Lord.

Because the Lord brings us together. He brings us into his family. We were thinking earlier on today about the spirit of God, the spirit of adoption.

[3 : 49] He brings us into the family of God and into faith in Christ. So that isolationism for a Christian is a contradiction.

Or being anti-social in our behavior is a contradiction. And in a sense one of the things that Elijah had to learn was that this was not the way it should be.

He was brought away out into the Wadi Karris, across the Jordan, put there on his own to learn from the Lord about the importance of being among God's people and ministering to them despite the hardship.

The interesting thing of course and apparent contradiction of it all is that it was there on his own at Brook Cairns that God blessed him.

God actually turned the isolation experience into an opportunity for teaching a servant.

[4 : 57] God's life. God's life. But it doesn't follow that we're to therefore seek to be on our own as believers. There's a place for going into our closet of course.

But we're not to try to function on our own apart from the fellowship of the Lord's people. And one of the things Elijah certainly learned from his experience was that.

Remember he was told by the Lord when he said, I alone am left on the seat of my life to take it. I have reserved for myself 7,000 in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah, you've got it wrong. You're not on your own. But at this point in his experience he's carted off or commanded to go across the Jordan eastward to the Brook Cairns. And what we're saying by way of introduction is that whilst it's true we can learn from being separated from the fellowship, it's not something we are to cultivate. [6 : 04] We're not to be looking to be separated from the fellowship of God's people. Elijah of course was taught this by God himself.

He was literally cut off from the people. He was taken away from them for a time. And in a sense God was preparing him. Actually there were three or four stages. He was preparing him by these lonely experiences to get in there and to function as a prophet to the people despite the hardship. He was preparing him for his task. And there's a sense you see in which each child of God in our own day can learn from this kind of what we may call a lonely experience. An isolation that God brings us into in our experience. He can use it. He can prepare us for some task or perhaps for some difficult trial.

[7 : 07] He uses these experiences and he would have us learn from them. Now you'll notice that back there in verse 1, Elijah made a sudden, almost unannounced appearance.

He just demanded to see Ab. And Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ab. We have no background here. He just goes straight in there and he speaks to Ahab. And there's a reminder to us that Elijah had that kind of power, that authority. He could go right into the king and say to him, Look here. This is what's going to happen. He made this bold appearance before King Ahab. And then he issued a word of judgment. There's going to be no rain in the land for these years except at my word. And of course he appeals the fact that he's a prophet of the God of Israel. And then having appeared before the king in that way, he simply leaves the king. [8 : 21] But not to go on a prophetic ministry. Not to do a circuit, an evangelistic tour. But he actually leaves to go into hiding.

And I want us to notice first of all, that the Lord commanded him to hide. You see it there. The word of the Lord came to him in verse 2.

Get away from here. Verse 3. And turn eastward and hide by the brute kereth, which flows into the Jordan. There was a place called Tishbe.

And Elijah was from that area. And that's more or less where he was going back to. He was of the inhabitants of Gilead, which was on the east side of the Jordan. And if you, in your mind's eye, picture the Sea of Galilee and you come down a few miles and then you go east.

You don't have to go very far over the Jordan. And you're really in the area of what is called the Wadi Keris. And that's where he was told to go.

[9 : 30] God told them to go there. And God told them because judgment was going to come upon a rebellious people. God told the prophet to tell Ahab, this is what's going to happen.

Judgment is about to come. The people must be taught that there is a price to pay for their evil doing, for turning their back on me.

And of course we know that it was God's purpose through the drought and the subsequent famine. It was God's purpose to humble the people.

To bring them low. To show them their blind folly and indeed to purge it out of them. That they might later on seek him and seek to know him personally.

That's what the whole contest on Carmel is all about, isn't it? If the Lord is God, serve him. And this is, if you like, the beginning of the process.

[10 : 37] This is the softening up process. This is God now speaking a word to Ahab and he's saying this is going to happen. And so Elijah's taken away for a time.

He's brought out of the situation. Elijah had to hide. And the very withdrawing of his presence from the people was not only good for Elijah in the long run, but it was necessary to speak to the people. It was an indication of God's judgment. Without the prophetic vision, the people perish.

That's what the word says. Without the proclamation. Faith comes by hearing. Hearing by the word of God. How shall they hear without a preacher? Take the preacher out and you've got problems.

Without the prophetic word, the vision, people perish. And this was a very vivid illustration to the people that God was serious.

[11 : 43] That God was going to judge them. That the drought and the famine were coming their way because of their rejection of his word and of his message of salvation.

So not only was there a literal drought coming and a famine, but there was the spiritual drought and the spiritual famine too.

The people were going to be denied the word from that great preacher of the word through whom they might come to know God. He was taking him out of the picture.

And you know, that has a very practical relevance to us today. Whatever was important for Elijah to learn, it had a solemn angle on it for the people.

God was taking his preacher away. They weren't going to hear him for a long season. They were going to be the poorer.

[12 : 56] And we see that even after the triumph on Carmel, the initial response, we will serve the Lord, fizzled away. In a short period it was gone and they were back to their idolatry.

God was going to remove the privileges they had. He was simply going to take away the preaching of the word.

There would be a spiritual famine. And this is something to say to us in our own day. It's not without notice to folks like me from the Highlands.

That as far as I know up to now there is no longer a gospel ministry in the town of Wyck in Caithness. I'm told there's not a gospel minister in that denomination in Caithness.

I'm told that apart from one or two of our own free church men, that's the way it is. There is a famine of the word of God cast upon the people.

[14 : 05] And you can multiply that in a little country like Scotland with a relatively small population. It's serious business when God takes away the gospel from among the people.

And I think it's important as we look at how God was speaking and taking Elijah away, that we pray for the continuance of the gospel among us in our land.

The Lord can easily remove it. There's no guarantees. Some of us reflect on this perhaps too much. And we think about what it's going to be like in another 20 years when we'll be in Emmanuel's land. And we're thinking about what is coming to our young people.

My dear friends, let us pray for the continuance of the gospel. Let us recognize, even from a passage like this, what God was doing. He was softening up the people for famine.

[15 : 11] Because of the drought that was coming. And he was softening them too to realize that there was coming a drought of the word of God and a famine of the word of God has happened.

The second thing within this point is Elijah was to hide for his safety of course, because Ahab was after him.

Ahab wanted to get a hold of him. Ahab wanted at least that he would pray that the word he had spoken would not come to pass. There would be a return of the dew and the rain.

And in fact we know that things, when the rain ceased and the drought came and the famine was round the corner as it were, Ahab was really concerned.

Ahab was really concerned. And he began to search for Elijah. We're told in chapter 18, verse 10, that there was another faithful prophet, Obadiah, and he informed Elijah that Ahab searched the whole of the land of Israel and he had searched every other nation round about.

[16 : 30] He wanted to find Elijah. In fact, he was so eager to find Elijah that he put the leaders of these nations he went to under oath that they weren't hiding Elijah.

He wanted to get a hold of him. And it's not difficult to use a little bit of sanctified imagination and picture how it was in Ahab's palace there in Samaria as the dew was no longer coming out to refresh the parched earth.

And the burning sun scorched everything and vegetation dried up. The seasonal rains failed and the situation was grim.

And the cry went out again and again. Where is Elijah the Tishbite? These are some of the reasons why God took him away.

But perhaps uppermost for us this evening is that God took him there to care. To learn from him. To rest a while.

[17 : 49] To be taught of him. It's interesting to notice that Jesus spoke to his disciples about this. Didn't he come apart for a while? There's far too much going on in your life.

And there's too little communion with me. We can be busy at all sorts of things. Legitimate things. And we can neglect our spiritual well-being.

And we need to be taught and re-taught by the Lord. Actually it struck me recently in the family worship. We were reading a little booklet there.

It struck me about how God took Paul when he was Saul of Tarsus the converted. And he took him and he taught him. He took him away from everybody into Arabia.

And he taught him directly. And he could have sent him to Jerusalem. To the disciples. And have him taught there the gospel.

[18 : 52] But no he didn't do that. He took him away and he prepared him there in Arabia himself. Jesus took the disciples earlier away aside.

Not once but again. To teach them. And it's interesting to trace out in Christian biography how in the life of some of these great characters, great leaders, preachers, how God took them away from everyone else in order to strengthen them in their communion with them.

How he taught them to depend upon him more and more. Who would ever have thought that John Knox, the great reformer in Scotland, would learn more of God and more of the love of Christ and the grace of Christ, shackled to an oar in a French galley.

Who would have thought that? But it happened. And that can be repeated. How many of the Lord's people were cast into prison?

And I'm thinking now in recent times rather than distant past. How many learned in communist prisons? How many learned more of Christ in these places?

[20 : 13] Jesus. Eternity alone will reveal it. God taking them away to teach them. To allow them to experience more of himself.

The thing about this is, for a fellow like Elijah, it was profoundly difficult. Elijah was very much up for the job. He wanted to see things change.

He was burning with zeal for the Lord God of hosts. And he was a forceful spirit. An eager spirit. And the work wasn't being effected.

The cause was becoming lower and lower. And he found it difficult. And so to be taken out of it, and to be bound up there as it were, in Wadi Keris, on the face of it, was difficult for him.

This is not the way to get the work done. And yet the Lord, you see, helped him to see it was his way. It was the way God would do it.

[21 : 22] It didn't seem to be the way that the Lord would eventually restore the people and bring them into the old paths. But God's ways are other than we think.

We can't use simple, however, useful logic may be in many a field. We can't use simple logic with God because his ways are above that.

That's not to say that they're logical. It's just that on a different level altogether. A different level. As the heavens are higher above the earth, so are my ways than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

So this is an important aspect of the whole business. Get out of here and go and hide by brute keris. Let's learn then something from what God did with Elijah.

It seemed a bit crazy to have to do it, but God was speaking. Do it. You go, you hide, and I'll do the rest.

[22 : 44] And we have to recognize that it's important to be sensitive what God says to us as we read the word, as we interact with other Christians, as we meditate, as we pray, what God brings before us as to his will for us.

Often, often in our own impetuousness, in our own fancied ability, understanding, we do what is actually contrary to his will, and we discover later on that really there was far too much of me in that. You remember how Milton said in that poem on his blindness, they serve, they serve God, who only stand and wait.

They wait upon him. And waiting upon God is waiting upon his time and way on his plans. And it's important for us to think about this in relation to ourselves.

Consulting him as we commit our way to him and our life to him. There are no uncertainties with him. They're all on our side. We don't know the future.

[24 : 05] He does. And it's important in our own spiritual progress, in our own church life, in our own employment situations, to commit all these things to him.

Lord, what would you have me do? It's not something that applied to the Apostle Paul and him alone. The principle is universal for the Lord's people. What would you have me to do? And for sure, Elijah was in the learning process on that subject. So he was commanded by the Lord to go and hide. The second thing the Lord assured him of provision. Verse 4 tells us, It shall be that you shall drink from the brook and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.

God assures his servant that he will provide for him. that there's no need to worry about it. And there in Wadi Karis, which flowed into the Jordan, he was entirely in God's hands.

[25 : 20] The Lord would provide. Now those who have been to it, I've been to a few places in Israel over the years, but I've not yet been to the brook Keris or Wadi Karis.

But I'm told that the sides, it's very much ravine-like and the sides are limestone walls, almost high walls. And he was down there in that narrow galley, we would say.

Secure from human investigation, living on what God himself had provided. Yes, water from the brook, but bread and meat from the ravens.

God provided for him. And I think it's important here to notice how that God chose the spot. God chose where there was enough water for him for as long as God intended.

And there was enough food as long as God intended. God would provide for him a place in the midst of his enemies. He would furnish his table as it were.

[26 : 32] Now, it's interesting, sometimes interpreters will go to great lengths to avoid what seems to be supernatural, what is supernatural.

And some commentators have tried to suggest somewhat disrespectfully, I think, that the ravens were actually Arabs or they were merchants coming from the east to the west that were on the trade routes.

It just shows you what folk will do to try and avoid talking about the miraculous. Well, God is a God of miracles and he makes no apology for it. He intervenes, he overrides, he he perforates the ordinary and what we call the ordinary, the natural laws, so-called.

No, God fed them. I have commanded the ravens to feed you. And to involve human beings in this is to miss the whole sense of the wonder of what is being said.

God is saying, I'll provide for you and I'll do it. I've commanded the ravens to feed you there. And so the prophet went and he did according to the word of the Lord.

[27 : 53] And 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. If you think about it, no one, let's assume for a moment that the folks who say there were Arab traders or there were traders from the Far East coming West, nobody having any contact with Elijah would be foolish enough to keep his whereabouts secret.

Ahab had offered a king's ransom. Ahab would do his very best for anyone who had any hint of knowledge of the prophet. No one would keep from making capital.

out of telling Elijah is by the brook care. No, no. The plain fact of the matter is God would provide for him, God would give him what he needed and he would do it through the ravens.

And this in a sense is wonderful really because the raven feeds himself. The raven is restless and greedy and it is that raven that God used, that God designed to feed his servant.

And it's important I think you see that we take something out of this. The ravens brought him bread. The raven that always gobbles up its food, the raven that is always searching for carrion.

[29 : 36] The raven brought him bread and meat morning and evening. I wonder if when it happened time and again, day after day, week after week, for as long as he was there, Elijah was singing a song of praise to God.

How excellent in all the earth, Lord our Lord, is thy name. Or something similar. Something that was true to the point, how wonderful you are, Lord, that you can do this, that you can make that wild creature of flight, that bird of prey, as it were, that bird that hunts and eats to survive.

You can make it feed me. Surely in it all, Elijah the prophet learned, perhaps as never before, what it means, what is written in the law of the Lord in Deuteronomy, you remember the Savior quoted Deuteronomy 8, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

You find it in Matthew 4, 4, and Jesus of course is quoting Deuteronomy 8, 3. In other words, God in Providence alone preserves and provides for his people.

The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. And what better way for the prophet to learn of his own littleness, of his own inability to maintain even his life, than to be brought into that experience. [31 : 29] And you see, in a way it's good for us. Most young men when they enter the ministry think they're going to transform the situation they're in, whether it's a village, or a town, or a city.

They think they're the answer to it. They think that they're the person the Lord needs to change nations. And one of the most difficult things to learn, it's not like that at all, God is at the helm, God is in control.

And no amount of ability or persuasiveness can make one whit of difference. People will not partake of the bread of heaven simply by the wisdom of men, or by their ability to manipulate the mind. they depend on the word of the Lord, from the Lord. And you see, the prophet had to learn that he couldn't even supply his own food, were it not for the Lord.

He had to learn to rely more heavily upon the power of God, and lean more upon the arm of his strength. Isn't it true that we're far too keen to resolve difficulties and manage our lives and progress our lives by our own wits and abilities?

[33 : 04] Elijah thought he was the answer to Israel's problems. He wasn't. And there in Brook Kerith, the walls towering above him, he was fed from a most unlikely source, wild ravens.

in order to know that the Lord provided for him. He was brought to depend for sure more and more upon the Lord.

And if you think about that, if you push this a little further into the practical realm for ourselves, isn't it true that we derive too much comfort from the means that we've acquired, from the abilities we've applied, for we rely too much on the possessions we've obtained.

And we lean not enough upon the Lord. We rely on our own understanding and not on his. Even although some of us, most of us, were taught from childhood, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path. Ah, well, but, you see, ah, well, but, you see, then we think we know better.

[34 : 29] And there in Brook Kerith, taken away out of the sea, God is teaching his servant. He's teaching the people, yes, and they'll know it.

They'll know what a famine of the world is. They'll know what it is to be hungry and thirsty for spiritual benefit. But, at the moment, we're thinking about Elijah learning from God that all his desire has to be into the Lord, and he must depend on him more and more.

And the history of the church is writ large with great men of faith, and I suppose women too, but I tend to look at preachers. And there are great lessons where you've got great men of God.

Take Richard Baxter, the Puritan, a very able, capable guy, and he was taken several times away from his family and away from his beloved books.

He was an avid reader, and he was taken away and he was left with nothing but a few old tottery books. that were falling to bits.

[35 : 44] God took him away and it said of Richard Baxter that he learned more of the Lord with just nothing but a few old books than ever he learned in his library.

That's the way God works. Let's be sensitive to what he's doing. Because in it all, we are to learn he will provide.

The last thing, the removal of the water supply. And the removal of the water supply was by the Lord, and it was a timely lesson for the prophet, and it happened, verse 7, after a while, that the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

eventually, in God's time, the brook dried up. But you see, it stayed flowing for as long as the Lord wanted it to flow and not a moment longer.

The stream in this remote rocky place at last refused to flow. And Elijah was suddenly plunged into another experience of God in providence.

[37 : 04] what am I going to do? Well, of course, the answer is in verse 8, the word of the Lord came to him and said, arise, go to Saraphath, that's a good hike, out to the coast, to Sidon.

But that's another story for another time. Now, suddenly, he's plunged into lessons in providence all over again. Well, here's a literal fulfillment of the saying we all know, you never miss the water till the well runs dry and here's brook kereth dry depth.

And he was fairly missing its waters. But isn't it true that when we have something like that removed, something we come to depend on, and assume it will always be there, we begin to realize

actually we've been relying not on the Lord who provided, but on the thing itself.

Isn't it true? Whether it's water and from the brook kereth, or something else, we actually, we say we rely on the Lord, but what we're really relying on is what we have.

And whether it's our friends we cling to, or our future comforts, it's only when they are removed from us, or we are removed from them, that we begin to realize that we've been actually clinging to and relying on these things or these people.

[38 : 37] And even in the sudden removal of the water, last drop gone, Elijah is back to leaning upon the Lord, to looking to him, to provide for him.

Not content anymore with the supply of water because it's gone. The food from the ravens, it's over. God is taking him further on, into ways unknown, as he discovers.

And that is a painful thing too, to learn, because suddenly we're taken out of what has become familiar and comfortable into something that's not at all inviting or comfortable.

and the church's history is writ large with the same thing. When the