

The Fire that Fell from Heaven

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 February 2026

Preacher: Jacob O'Boyle

[0 : 0 0] Hello, my name's Jacob. Now I've got a mic here and there's a mic there, so I don't want to do the thing where it reverberates and creates a whole bunch of stuff, but I trust you've got it, so no worries there. It's a privilege to get to be here with you today. Like I said, my name's Jacob, my wife is called Grace, and we have a little two-and-a-half-year-old called Jude, and we live on the Isle of Anglesey, and it's just such a privilege to get to come and share God's word with you today. I wanted to begin this talk with a story of mine. It's been about five years since this happened, five, six, so the embarrassment is almost over. My wife and I lived in Chicago in America, and it's about March, April time, and we go to the shops to do our regular shop, and we notice the shelves are bare when it came to get the toilet paper, and the reason being, you know, it's COVID. And so Grace turns to me and says, I think I maybe see a couple of boxes over there, but we should really get one in case, and I said, no, no, no, no. We have toilet paper at home. We are fine.

So, as you can imagine, we go home, we get in the lift, go up to our apartment, we walk in, I look, and sheepishly come out and say, I was wrong. We do not have any toilet paper. We actually only have one roll. And she gives me the loving look of someone who knows. And so I say, but don't worry, I will provide. I will go and get us some toilet paper. We're recently married, and I'm very, very eager to prove my manliness to her and my ability to provide. So I walk out of the apartment there, and then I get in the lift, I go downstairs, I walk outside, and I go to the nearest shop, and I walk in, and I look, and there is no toilet paper. And I go to the shopkeeper, and I say, do you have any, any toilet paper? No.

I say, no worries. Slightly less confident, I walk to the next shop, thinking it's going to be fine. I walk in, and I say, do you have any toilet paper? No. I walk to the next shop, and the next shop, and the next shop. And finally, I walk in, and there the shopkeeper says, we do actually. And he walks into the back, and he brings out this very pleasantly packaged something of toilet paper, and I take it home, and I'm very proud of myself, and I have come, and I've provided, and I bring it in. And she says, oh, well done. And I open it up, and lo and behold, it's scented. And my wife is definitely allergic to whatever is on this weird special toilet paper. And I think, oh, goodness. And she's just got off a call with her parents, and I'm thinking, oh, no, what are we going to do? So I say, I'll take a night to think about it, pray about it. We'll see if the Lord provides toilet paper. So the next day, I go down to our mail room, and lo and behold, there is a massive package. And you know what it is, because of how I've told this story. Grace's father had heard about what we needed, hadn't consulted us, just sent us a massive package of toilet paper. And I don't know about you, this is a little bit of a light story, but we can have seasons of scarcity, and we feel like we need to accumulate things to be able to provide for ourselves. And no matter how hard we try, we try to provide for each other and ourselves, and it just doesn't work out the way we had hoped. The good news is that we have a God who provides. We have a God who cares for us. And so our task is not to provide for ourselves in itself, but to follow the provider. If you'll turn with me, if you have your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 18.

The Israelites have had a season of drought. It's a little bit more intense than toilet paper, though, because this is drought of water, which means that they're not getting some of their basic human needs.

They need water to drink. They need water for crops, for vegetation, to be able to give themselves food. And this all begins in chapter 17. You may remember Elijah goes to King Ahab. He is the worst king yet for Israel after there's been a country split where Israel in the north and Judah in the south, and King Ahab is up here, and he's married a Phoenician princess called Jezebel, and she has brought in Baal and prophets of Asherah, and they all come into Israel and start to infect the country with idolatry and start leading God's people away from Yahweh, the one true God. And

Elijah comes, and you probably remember from last week and the week before, Baal is the rain god, the storm god. And so if you worship someone like Baal, who provides fertility and life in theory, you're going to come away thinking that that is who you rely on for things like water. And Elijah says, as the Lord, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except my word. And we have chapter after chapter, or the next chapter is all about Elijah interacting with people in the land and how

[5 : 42] God, in his graciousness amidst this drought, provides for individuals. And here in this chapter, we're going to see God provide for the nation. After a long time, beginning of chapter 18, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, go and present yourself to Ahab, and I'll send rain on the land. So Elijah goes to Ahab. And when he arrives, there's a man called Obadiah, who has been sneaking Christians away because Jezebel's persecution of Christians has gotten so bad that her prophets of Baal are killing systematically the worshipers and prophets of Yahweh. And so Obadiah has faithfully hidden them away, and he's serving Ahab. And Elijah comes in and says, hey, go get your master. I'm going to come and talk to him. And this frightens Obadiah, but eventually they go back and forth, and it gets to the point where Elijah goes in to speak to Ahab. And Ahab says in verse 17, when he saw Elijah, he said to him, is that you troubler of Israel?

Well, this is ironic, obviously. Ahab is the reason that this drought has gone on for three years. I've not made trouble for Israel, Elijah replied, but you and your father's family have. You've abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel and bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table. This tells us a couple things. It tells us that Jezebel is funding and empowering the prophets of Asherah and Baal. So this is a government-issued colonization of religious persecution that's happening towards God's people. This used to be a time of religious tolerance.

People would live down the road from people who worshipped very differently from you, and most of the time they were relatively tolerant. So for these new prophets to come in and start killing people, that's actually a very big deal. And so he says, bring them all on up to the mountain. Now whenever we have a mountain in the Bible, it usually means something. And that's because when we take most of the Old Testament, everything after the book of Deuteronomy often refers back to the first five books of the Bible. So Kings is originally, we're not entirely sure who wrote it, but it's probably the prophet Jeremiah, or at least heavily influenced by him and his scribe Baruch. And they're writing at the time that this is written. They're looking back on Israel's history, history, and they're sending information out to the exiles who have been persecuted, captivated, and sent all across the world away from their home because their home was raided and conquered by empires. And so when we have a book like this, it's good to know the audience because the audience is going to be reading this and thinking, how does this apply to my life? We do the same thing.

[9 : 01] Well, it's important to go and see what the audience did and what they would have interpreted when reading this. And oftentimes we see Kings. It was written as one book. And we think, oh, okay, this is just the story of how it got from point A to point B, how we went from David, who was great and loved God, to being scattered among the nations and not having a home anymore. And Kings is just the decline. But actually, the people writing Kings have a message. And that message is that amidst unfaithfulness, amidst going away from God, you have a God who remains faithful and continues to provide regardless of how unfaithful his people are being. This season of drought is to make a point. It's to make the point that Baal is not God. Baal does not provide rain. There is only one God of Israel, and in fact, the world, and that is Yahweh. So I say all of this, the audience, when they see something like a mountain, their good Torah reading hats are going to be on and they're going to think, okay, how does this relate to our origin story? Torah, the first five books of the Bible, what does this have to do with that? Because that's how we interpret everything else.

We as Christians often interpret everything through Jesus. They would have done that through Torah. And so when you go to a place and there's a mountain, there's going to be a light bulb that goes, aha, pay attention to this, because mountains are a recurring theme throughout Torah. In Genesis 1 and 2, you have this Garden Eden, and it's on a mountain. We know this because there's four rivers that run through it, and we traditionally see this as a cosmic sort of temple where God comes down and interacts with his people, and they get to be in his presence. And God

provides fruit and food and life. And we all know how Genesis goes, and they leave. Later in the book of Genesis, we have Abraham.

Abraham goes up a mountain, Mount Moriah, where he's going to sacrifice Isaac, and God provides a ram in Isaac's place. Further on, we have Moses who goes up a mountain while he's being a shepherd, and he sees this burning bush, and God provides information about who he is, self-disclosure of the almighty. And he then goes on and provides promises and power for which and through which Moses is going to lead Israel away from captivity and slavery. And later on, on a mountain, Mount Sinai, God is going to come down and meet Moses and give him his laws, which are going to help shape the culture of the followers of Yahweh. And so you see this, go up a mountain, go Mount Carmel, people are going to be going, oh, something's about to happen, and it's going to be quite big. God is going to show up. The other thing here is Mount Carmel. Carmel is a Hebrew word. Oftentimes, we have the Bible, and it's translated from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to English, and that's great. Oftentimes, though, there are moments where something doesn't quite get translated. It gets transliterated. So instead of saying, oh, Jacob in Genesis, we're going to call him heel grabber because that's what his name means. You don't see a bunch of, oh, and heel grabber did this, and heel grabber did that. Doesn't quite work. [12:39] That's because of just how language works. So instead they go, his name was Jacob. And if you do a little bit of research, you'll see that his name means heel grabber. Well, Carmel has another meaning because it's a Hebrew word. It doesn't mean caramel. It means garden. It means a cultivated garden.

So again, you're going to put your faithful reading cap on, and you will see, oh, we're going up a mountain, up Mount Garden, and all those people that worship idols and have encouraged us to worship idols and have been leading us astray, they're going to show up to this Mount Garden with us.

So Ahab sends word throughout all of Israel, which is quite obliging of Ahab. He's quite a passive character. Jezebel's often the one that's pushing for evil things to happen. Ahab often gives up his kingship over to Jezebel. He gives his responsibilities and authority over to her to do what she will. But he obliges. He sends word throughout all of Israel and assembles the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went up before the people and said, how long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. If Baal is God, follow him. But the people said nothing. Now, again, we read the Bible and we just go, oh yeah, people said nothing. Imagine you've been congregated to this mountain.

The only prophet of God that we're aware of in the area steps up and he says, you've been wavering back and forth. You sometimes worship this one. You sometimes worship that one. [14:17] Pick. You don't get to just keep doing this. You have to decide who are you going to follow? So the idols or Yahweh? And then nothing. Okay. Elijah says to them, I'm the only one of the Lord's prophets left. Now, it's a bit dramatic because we know that earlier in the chapter, there are some prophets still alive. They're being hidden because Jezebel's trying to kill them. So at least in this moment, he's the only one on the mountain we're aware of. I'm the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has 450. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal, let Baal go first. They will choose one for themselves, one of these bulls, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood, but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood, but not set fire to it. So if you can imagine, I hope this is okay. I didn't consult anyone. Altar number one. Altar number two. And he says,

Baal's prophets, there's a lot of them, so they can go first. So when you call on the name of your God, and I will call on the name of the Lord, Yahweh. The God who answers by fire, he is God. Now, that's quite cool because Baal, if he's the storm God, he's going to answer in theory with a lightning bolt, which will create fire. And so again, Elijah is saying, hey, my God can beat you at your thing.

That actually, again, Torah cap on, that happens in Exodus. When we see those curses, when the river Nile runs red with blood, that's Yahweh subverting the God of Egypt, the river God. When darkness descends on the land, that's God subverting the sun God Ra. So he's doing it again. Then all the people said, what you say is good. Whichever God, they can prove themselves to us. That's fine.

So Elijah says to the prophets of Baal, choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your God, but do not light the fire. So they prepare it. They get

it all nice. They set it up. And then they worship Baal. And they call on Baal. And they ask him, hey, you are the rain God. Come show us that you are God. They called on the name of Baal from morning to noon. Baal, answer us. So morning to noon, again, we read this and we just go, okay, great. That's fine.

[17:12] That's a long time. That's a very long time for you to have to sit there and just wait. Because not everyone on this mountain are prophets trying to get their God to do their thing. If you're an Israelite and you're waiting, waiting. And so you're going to be waiting for this God to show up and he doesn't. And Elijah eventually, yeah, okay. Do you want to call a bit louder?

Shout louder. Surely he is a God. Perhaps he is deep in thought or busy. Bibles have to sell. Probably you could translate that as, is he on the toilet? Is he sleeping? Maybe he is on holiday. So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears and blood flows. This is, this sounds a bit barbaric to us. That's what they did. That was their custom, these Baal worshippers. One of the other things that they would do is they dance. They're giving up parts of themselves to try and get their God to do something for them because Baal is not real. We all know this. As you're reading this, we know that Baal is not real. We don't have anyone who worships Baal to this day. But they think that they can manipulate their God to do something for them. So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords. Midday passes. They continue frantic prophesying until the time for evening sacrifice.

[19:03] No response. So now the Israelites have been waiting all day and there is a drought. You are going to feel pretty tough. Then Elijah says to all the people, come here, come to me. They came to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord. Notice the word repaired and not built. This had been built here already and someone has disrepaired it. The prophets of Baal who are persecuting the believers of Yahweh likely are behind this. So he repairs what had belonged to the Lord, puts it back together, and he gets 12 stones, one for each of Israel. Now this is interesting because if you are following on, you know that Israel is not 12 tribes anymore. It's 10. This is a way of saying God is still God of all his promised people. He hasn't forgotten them. And so he then has them fill up four jars of water. Again, it's a drought and you're thirsty and you're watching someone waste water. And you're pouring water onto this. Now,

I don't know about you if you've ever been camping. If you try to set fire to wet wood, it doesn't go well. Elijah's trying to make a point. At the time of the sacrifice, the prophet Elijah steps forward and prays, Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Jacob, let it be known today that you are the God of Israel and I'm your servant because we've been waiting all day and everybody is waiting to see you show up. It's not going to go well for me if you don't, you know. So answer me, Lord, answer me so the people will know that you are the Lord, the God, and that you are turning their hearts back again. Then fire falls down and burns up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil and licks up the water in the trench. I don't know if you know how hot fire has to be for it to burn stone. It's between 600 degrees Celsius and 2,000. So it's very hot. It's very hot. And Elijah then looks and all the people see this. They fall prostrate and cry, the Lord, he is God, the Lord, he is God. Elijah commands them, seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away. They seize them. Elijah has them brought down to the Kishon Valley and has them slaughtered there. This is foreign to us. We don't know what to do with violence in the Bible often because it doesn't quite always fit with what we see of Jesus later on.

There's a couple of things to note here. We don't see that God says, you do this. Elijah says, do this. Now, Elijah is God's prophet and there is reason to think that God may be sanctioning this. We don't know. But what we do know is that these prophets are the people that were killing Yahweh's prophets. And so there is a sort of parallel moment here where the people who had been persecuting Yahweh's prophets are now being held accountable for their actions.

So Elijah says to Ahab, this is verse 41, and we didn't quite get here, but it's really important that we do. Elijah said to Ahab, go and eat and drink, for there is the sound of heavy rain.

[22:47] And in verse 44, we'll see the seventh time the servant reports to Elijah. A cloud as small as a man's hand rises from the sea and a massive storm comes on. And after three years of no rain, they get a flood of heavy rain. God provides. You might be in a season of drought. That may be where you're at. You may be in a season of prosperity.

God is the one who provides. When you have, God provides. When you don't have, God is the one who will provide. Who has provided in the past, who provides currently, and who has guaranteed to provide in the future.

The thing we sometimes skip over here is that, again, let's put on our good Torah reading caps. In Deuteronomy chapter 17, it says, Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole idols. Do not sacrifice to the Lord your God with animals that have defects, that are not everything that you have, the best of what you have to give. But don't sacrifice to idols. Because if you catch someone worshipping an idol, you're to put them to death. That's very serious. And God doesn't hold us accountable to that today, thankfully.

[24 : 15] If you've ever worshipped something or spent time and energy and given part of yourself, hoping on something other than God, thankfully we're not held to this standard anymore. But we are in another way.

And when we look at kings, God does not have the people in Israel that worshipped idols stoned. He graciously gives them rain. Did they deserve it? No. He provided anyway. His mission, we see, why he's doing what he's doing, is because he's turning the hearts of his people back to him, the provider. They have spent their time, their energy, their effort, their emotional bandwidth, all on idols that cannot provide because they are incapable of doing so. Idols can't provide. But Yahweh can. And he has done this so that he will bring the people back to the one who is capable of taking care of them.

[25 : 20] And there on a mountain, Elijah tells Ahab, the person who has been the cause of all of this nastiness, this drought, and he says, go and eat.

He tells this sinful king, go and eat on a mountain called Garden. It's not lost on the readers what God is doing here. He is graciously, kindly showing how much he cares for all of his people, regardless of how unfaithful they have been to him. When I was 15 years old, I was sat playing my piano one day, and I reached to play a high note, and it doesn't. Now, if you've ever played the piano, and your finger doesn't respond when you tell it to do something, that's a bit weird. The day goes on, and my hand starts to not do what it's supposed to do when I try to tell my fingers to do something. It's a very weird sensation. The next day, I have a hard time sitting up, and within 24 hours, I'm in a hospital where we lived in Thailand at the time, and I can't move.

[26 : 33] I'm paralyzed, neck down. I've contracted what I'll later find out is something called Guillain-Barre syndrome. It's rare, it's not pleasant, and it can be worse or better, depending on a variety of factors, but I can't move.

And the doctor, thankfully, identifies roughly what's going on. They say, okay, here's what he needs, this medicine. You should check in with your insurance company. I don't have the NHS. You should check in with your insurance company to see if they'll cover this, because it costs a lot of money if they won't cover it. And they're obviously having this conversation with my dad, who loves me very much, and they say, it's probably going to be upwards of \$40,000 to \$50,000 if the insurance wouldn't cover it. And my parents are missionaries and walk around with \$40,000 in their pockets. What are you supposed to do in that moment? You pray, and you wait on the one who provides, and you act in faith. And in that moment, my dad, he followed what he felt God tell him to do, the one who provides, and he said, let's move forward, and we'll see what happens.

[27 : 46] And at first, the insurance company didn't want to cover it, and that is not good. Give it a bit of time, and the insurance company decide that they will cover it. He acted in faith, based off of what he was able to do, and God provided abundantly and more.

And God healed me. Within four days, I was able to sort of walk again, where it can sometimes take people six months to regain function of a side of their body. Within a month, I was able to run, and within two months, I was able to run a 5K, five-kilometer race, about 10 minutes faster than I had the year before. God healed me, and I'm so grateful that he did. He provided medicine for me to be able to heal, and he equipped my body with what it needed to do the healing work that it does. And there are times when we go to our provider, our Father in Heaven, and we sometimes feel like we get nothing back. That's what we're going to talk about next week. But if you decide to cynically sit in a place where you don't believe that God will provide, that's as much an act of unfaith as it is

to pretend that you can tell him what to do, and he will do it.

God has told us again and again that he will provide for us, and that he is with us, and that he cares for us. What he invites us to do is not earn our healing and our provision.

[29 : 22] He invites us to follow him because he is the true, authentic provider. So I want to challenge you this week. How can you follow him?

Something tangible in your life. Something where you can say, I am trying to hold this thing where I can provide for it, and I need to give that over to you because at the end of the day, you are the one that provides.

What's one thing you could do this week? What would it look like if we were a community where people who weren't familiar with Jesus saw that the people that follow Jesus have this radical trust, this sense of peace?

Anxiety is real, and it matters, and God works with us in it, but God is the provider, and one of the big drivers of anxiety is when we try to control things we are unable to do on our own.

So that's what I challenge you with this week. What's one thing you can give over to God? I'm going to pray now. Father in heaven, thank you so much for this time where we get to read your word together.

[30 : 29] Thank you for being the one who provides, the one who cares for us. We pray that you would be with us this week. Where there is heartbreak, and where there is drought, we pray for rain.

But even if there isn't rain, Lord, we pray that you will help us have the faith to follow you because we know that ultimately you are provider. We thank you so much for your word and for your presence, that you are with us.

We thank you, Jesus, for what you did on the cross and how you have brought us into a deeper and permanent relationship with God. Amen.

Thank you.