

# Fed by Ravens, Sustained by God

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Date: 18 January 2026

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning we'll be considering the episode immediately after Elijah tells Ahab about the impending drought when the word of the Lord comes to Elijah and tells him to hide in the Kareth ravine to use this stream for drinking water and to allow himself to be fed by ravens.

Now somewhat frustratingly I feel we are not told why God told Elijah to go and hide but we do know from previous chapters that we haven't looked at as part of this series that Ahab had turned away from Jehovah to worship the false gods of Baal and Asherah.

Baal being worshipped as the god of rain and fertility and storms and Asherah being worshipped as a goddess of fertility motherhood and wisdom.

And we are told in various chapters around this that the Israelites had set up Asherah poles which are either carved poles or trees with carvings on them that are worshipped as part of a fertility rite. So very much false gods, false idols. So Elijah, having declared drought in the name of Jehovah, was effectively telling Ahab and Ahab's wife Jezebel that their god of rain and storm and fertility was subject to the more powerful true god of the Israelites, namely Jehovah.

[ 1 : 39 ] It may actually be the case then that Elijah was relieved that God told him to exclude himself away from potential retribution.

Also, as we've been learning over the past few months, names in the Bible associated with God and Jesus have meaning. And it is no less true for some of the places in the Bible that are given specific names.

For example, Beersheba is the well of oath, Bethlehem the house of bread, Jerusalem city of peace. But more often than not, places are just named after a geographical or topographical feature.

And Kerith, possibly slightly a bit of the two between its name. Its main meaning is winter stream or brook or a cutting, like a cutting in a hillside, or from extending from that cut off as in hidden.

So you can either think of it as a place, it's where the stream was that he was sent, or you could think of it as a symbol of God saying to Elijah, go and cut yourself off from the rest of the Israelites for the time being.

[ 3 : 02 ] We also have in this story divine intervention in the form of ravens providing bread and meat for Elijah on a day-to-day basis. Just as in the parallel reading from the New Testament, each day has enough worry of its own, don't worry about tomorrow, think about today.

And I felt this echoed God's provision of manna and quail to the Israelites during their 40 years of wandering in the desert. Each day, enough for the day, except at the end of the week when they gathered double to see them through the Sabbath.

And as John pointed out last week, ravens are known as scavengers, and so not very likely to be acting as the harvesters or, if you like, the deliveroo employees.

And not only are they scavengers, they're ceremonially unclean animals. And therefore, Elijah would have been expected to avoid them to make sure he didn't become unclean.

And the teaching about that comes in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, amongst other lists of unclean animals to be avoided. Likewise, building on John's description of God's upside-down kingdom, the raven, rather than being someone that provided for others, was often cited as a creature for whom God made provision, proverbially, if you like, although not in Proverbs itself.

[ 4 : 33 ] Psalm 147 says that God provides food for the cattle and the young ravens. So God provides for the ravens. In Job, which was probably already part of the oral tradition known to Israel at the time of Elijah, if not necessarily a written document yet, God poses the rhetorical question to Job, who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for the lack of food?

In the New Testament passage we read, the birds of the air, they are provided for. And in actual fact, in the parallel passage in Luke 12, Jesus, talking about anxiety and trust, specifically recorded as saying, consider the ravens.

They do not sow or reap. They have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds. In this upside-down kingdom, we have those for whom God provides suddenly becoming those through whom God provides. those without any provisions, any riches, if you like, of their own, providing for those who at the time have even less.

So looking a bit more at these specific six verses in Kings. Right after Elijah declares drought in the name of the Lord, that will only be broken on his, that is, Elijah's say-so, there's no actual recorded response or reaction from Ahab to suggest that Ahab was concerned enough by this to consider repenting of his idolatry and turning back to Jehovah.

[ 6 : 27 ] A reminder for us, possibly, that we may speak truth to people or share our testimony or share the gospel and challenge them, either implicitly or explicitly, in what we say and do.

There's no guarantee that the person who hears will respond in the way that they should or that we would like them to or that is best for them. And again, parallels with Moses and Aaron challenging and speaking to Pharaoh when they were trying to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites free from Egypt.

And just to expand on this, possibly more specifically, in Ezekiel chapter 3, God declares, when I say to a wicked person, you will surely die and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin and I will hold you accountable for their blood.

But if you do warn the wicked person and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin. But you will have saved yourself.

Again, when a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil and I put a stumbling block before them, they will die. Since you did not warn them, they will die for their sin.

[ 7 : 59 ] The righteous things that person did will not be remembered and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the righteous person not to sin and they do not sin, they will surely live because they took warning and you will have saved yourself.

Which may seem like quite a heavy burden that we could be blamed or responsible for other people's wickedness and sin. But God says, God says, not if you challenge them, not if you speak to them.

Your part is to bring truth to them. What they do with that truth is their responsibility. But if you do not bring that truth to them, I will hold you responsible.

Also, Elijah was told to isolate himself and to trust only on God for his needs. I think it would have been nice for Elijah if after he'd been up and challenged Ahab and Jezebel and declared this drought on the land, that he'd have been able to go back and spend a bit of time with his own people, maybe some other prophets or religious leaders and just receive a bit of slap on the back if you like.

And congratulations, well done, standing up to Ahab and speaking for the Lord of God boldly, well done. But there was none of that. No sense of stay with us, we'll keep you safe, we've got your back because we know how vindictive Ahab and Jezebel can be.

[ 9 : 29 ] We'll protect you and keep you safe. No, Elijah was told to leave all that behind and go and live in isolation for a while and trust and relate only to God.

Also, it's been highlighted by the readings this morning, the food that Elijah needed was provided on a daily basis, not just from an unexpected source, but from an unclean one.

And again, as well as echoing the time of Israelites wandering the desert, we might also see a foreshadowing of Jesus' time in the wilderness. As for both Elijah and for Jesus, their main public ministry came after this time of isolation and separation and total dependence upon God.

To sort of summarise and maybe make it a bit more succinct and maybe a bit more obvious for me at least, and try and make them a bit more relevant, I'll sort of summarise some of these points like this.

After a time of challenging someone in authority or speaking out boldly in the name of God, may not necessarily be to someone in authority, may be to a friend or a family member or a colleague, the next step may be something more akin to a tactical or recuperative retreat rather than basking triumphantly in the glory of a job well done and a speech well spoken.

[ 11 : 05 ] If you like, after something like that, a time of social or social media detoxing and dietary detoxing as cleansing for the greater tasks ahead.

there may be times when we feel or actually are cut off from the support of those close to us or other like-minded Christians.

But that does not mean that God has left us. Indeed, it might be a time when we draw more closely to him. So if that's something you feel like, you feel that maybe others aren't listening to you, they don't understand you, or they don't know what you're going through.

Be reassured that God does and that God will draw close to you even if you feel distant from others. God is able to provide for our daily needs.

Sometimes miraculously, maybe from an unlikely or improbable source, maybe even from a source that we don't recognise at first as being God's provision because it's such an unlikely place to come from.

[ 12 : 20 ] God asks us to speak out his word and to live it out. How others respond is not our responsibility. Let us therefore be careful to listen out for God's word to us.

Whether it be to speak out specifically, maybe he's telling us to spend some time in retreat or maybe he's saying just trust in his provision wherever that may come from and to do what he tells us.

The word of the Lord came to Elijah, go and exclude yourself from other people. Maybe God is asking you to do something which seems strange or likely to be unhelpful or difficult to do.

But Elijah followed the word of God and it led to a time of preparation after which he performed even greater miracles and became even more effective in the life of the Israelites.

So let us consider Elijah in this. He listened to God and he acted on what God said. He trusted in God even with the strange instructions he had to follow.

[ 13 : 42 ] And remember that God asks us to do, to speak, to live, but how others react is between him and them. Amen.