

# Lessons from the life of Elijah

## 2. "Hide thyself by the brook Cherith" (1 Kgs. 17:3-6)

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**A**FTER ELIJAH had uttered words of judgement upon Ahab and his courtiers, the great prophet was commanded by God to hide himself until the period of punishment had transpired (1 Kgs. 17:3).

### "Get thee hence"

Before Elijah receives the Divine commission, he is found sharing in the common calamity. There he stands, exposed with the ungodly to famine and death. But the prophet did not long remain in this solitary condition, for he was soon commanded: "Get thee hence, and turn thee" (v. 3). The language is similar to that spoken to Abraham when he was commanded to leave Ur of the Chaldees: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1).

This commandment, "Get thee hence", has gone forth from heaven unto every generation of believers on earth, just as Solomon had commanded his beloved Egyptian bride: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house" (Ps. 45:10). We have all likewise been commanded, "come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). This command not only speaks of the immediate moment, but also relates to a future time when we shall be taken to the place of judgement to meet the Great Judge of the earth (1 Thess. 4:17).

Elijah was commanded, "turn [*panah*] thee eastward" (1 Kgs. 17:3). This word *panah* conveys the idea of 'turning away', 'putting out of the way' or 'making clear away'. The prophet was being instructed that he must now physically and spiritually turn his back on the children of Israel and go eastward. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for 'eastward' is *qedem*, which speaks of 'antiquity', 'an ancient time', 'a time of old' or 'the beginning'. Not only should Elijah physically remove himself from the children of Israel and from this most desperate of scenes, but he should also take his mind back to the time of the beginning, the time of the ancients, a time when Israel was in covenant relationship with their God.

### "Hide thyself"

The prophet was to turn eastward from Samaria, where he had proclaimed the Divine judgement to Ahab, and hide himself. There was to be no flaming chariot or convoy of angels to bear him away from his troubles; God was going to reveal another path. No instantaneous spiritual deliverance was to be provided; instead he was to make a long journey on foot. What an uninviting proposition! He was then to hide himself so that he was removed from this scene of distress. He was to journey to the brook and not be found.

It is remarkable how God's elect messengers, each in turn, have been sent "apart into a desert place [to] rest awhile" (Mk. 6:31). Such times provide opportunity for self-examination, and for prayer with Him Who "seeth in secret" (Mt. 6:6). Moses spent forty days and forty nights in Horeb, the Mount of God. John the Baptist's life was almost divided between the desert and prison. The Apostle Paul learned the gospel in Arabia. Our Master commenced his ministry with a forty-day fast, and during his ministry it was in desert places that he found solace and refuge (Lk. 4:1,2; Jno. 10:39,40).

The word translated 'hide' here, *sathar*, can alternatively be rendered 'absent' (cf. Gen. 31:49). It is therefore not a word that suggests Elijah needed to hide himself from the wrath of Ahab in order that he might preserve his life, but rather that he should simply remove himself from the scene, to preclude all earnest entreaties to remove the Divine punishment. God was working through Elijah; without the prophet there would be no rain. So, in the mind of Ahab, it would have been much better to have Elijah alive than dead. This touches on the profound subject of God-manifestation, the Father using Elijah as a vehicle for His power and glory. Therefore, rendering the phrase alternatively as "absent thyself", it is observed that God was depriving His people of His Divine vehicle and leaving them in spiritual darkness.

### "The brook Cherith, that is before Jordan"

Elijah was sent to the brook Cherith, in northern Gilead. It would have been a great comfort to

the prophet to know that he was being Divinely protected near the place where he was born and raised. He may well have had a familiar knowledge of the brook and its immediate vicinity. There was no doubt in the prophet's mind that God would provide. Yet this would also serve as a valuable time of education, learning and reflection. This is certainly suggested by the meaning of the name Cherith: 'separation'. The great prophet was being reminded of the fundamental principle of separation, for he was to separate himself from his fellow men and their calamitous state while God's judgements and woes passed upon the land.

Finally, we note that the brook Cherith is described as being "before Jordan" (1 Kgs. 17:3,5). How strange that Elijah is commanded to travel to a brook, yet it faced this great river! The prophet would have to have faith that he would be sustained at the brook, rather than the Jordan, during a time of severe drought and barrenness. The Arabic word for Jordan is *Nahr-esh-Sheriah*, or 'the watering place', thus describing the very thing the prophet desired. He required a watering place instead of a little stream to quench his thirst and ultimately sustain him during this time of isolation. Or so he thought. However, the Great Almighty did not desire to send His prophet to a place which could easily provide for him, but to one where his faith would be tested, and where he would have to depend upon the Divine hand.

#### **Foreshadowing John the Baptist and Christ**

Many years later, at Jordan, another man would come "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Lk. 1:17), and would baptize there in the Name of the God of Israel. As Isaiah prophesied, it would be this man of the lonely wilderness who would declare to the children of Israel: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (40:6-8).

It would also be at Jordan that the greatest prophet of all, a greater than Elijah, namely the Lord Jesus Christ, would commit himself to the waters of baptism at the hands of John the Baptist (Mk. 1:9), and here would abide while many "resorted unto him" and "believed on him" (Jno. 10:40-42). Elijah was about to receive of the bread and meat from heaven, provided by the ravens; the Lord Jesus would give himself as "the living

bread . . . from heaven", of which he was able to say that, unlike the bread which Elijah was about to partake of, "if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (6:51).

#### **The prophet's Divine provision**

The words of God, "thou shalt drink of the brook" (1 Kgs. 17:4), do not sufficiently convey the great hand of providence behind the supply of these waters. For it was not long before the whole country was like a heath, scorched by the sun; yet one spot alone continued to flourish. There was a drought throughout the land, yet Elijah was provided for.

Not only would there be water, but food also would be brought to sustain him. The Hebrew for 'feed' is *kuwl*, alternatively translated as 'contain', 'sustain', 'maintain' or 'nourish'. (The same Hebrew word is used in verse 9 to describe the actions of the widow woman who fed him at Zarephath.) The strength of this word is conveyed in the words of Joseph to his own brethren: "there will I *nourish* thee" (Gen. 45:11). The Sweet Psalmist of Israel picked up these sentiments when he said, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and He shall *sustain* thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Ps. 55:22). God was not going to allow His prophet Elijah "to be moved"; he would be maintained and nourished at Cherith. He was to have no fear of going without; he would have more than sufficient.

Bread and flesh were given to Elijah twice a day: "bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening" (1 Kgs. 17:6). This conjures up a wonderful scene, the ravens bringing Elijah his food at the first moment of the day, as the sun broke, during his first conscious moment of a new day. What a comforting picture! Each morning, as Elijah awoke from the darkness of sleep, he would be welcomed by a new blessing (Lam. 3:22-24). Then, as the sun set in the west, and the last few moments of light drew to a final close, Elijah was visited by friends with a gift from God.

#### **God will supply His servants**

It was the prophet Isaiah who testified of the righteous, "bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure" (33:16). The God of Israel will always supply that which is lacking for His servants. The psalmist declared: "[I have] not seen

the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (37:25). In the barren wilderness He gave bread from heaven.

The psalmist also attested: "in the days of famine they shall be satisfied" (v. 19). Elijah, to use the words of Psalm 105, "called for a famine upon the land: [and] brake the whole staff of bread" (v. 16); but he himself had enough and to spare. God spread for His prophet "a table in the wilderness" (78:19). Indeed, Elijah was well looked after.

The Father was comforting Elijah and teaching him that he should not worry; that food from heaven would be provided daily in his desert surroundings. Surely this links with the words of the Master: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt. 6:34). This is of relevance to ourselves, for we are all currently wandering through the wilderness of life, journeying towards the Promised Land, and we similarly suffer from the elements of a spiritually barren place, even this dry and thirsty world. Yet God has spread for His servants a table of blessings, even food and drink to sustain us on our journey, as we leave the land of idolatry behind.

#### **Divine messengers take all forms**

God carefully selected the means by which He would sustain His prophet during this severe drought. He had at His disposal the angelic host, His mighty Elohim, yet He chose His humble winged creatures to tend to the prophet's needs. This is not an isolated incident, for at other times God has used animals to fulfil His purpose, in acts of both mercy and judgement (*cf.* 1 Kgs. 13:24; 2 Kgs. 2:24; Dan. 6:22; 2 Pet. 2:16). God reminded Elijah that His entire creation is reliant upon Him, and that, at His choosing, the meanest of all creatures could be as effective as the mightiest of His creation, even the angelic Elohim. Whether it be the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, the wild beasts of the field or even the winds and the waves, all hearken to His voice and are led by His command.

Under the Law the raven was unclean; the Law dictated that "every raven after his kind" could not be eaten (Lev. 11:13,15). Yet Elijah accepted this token of mercy without hesitation and with a thankful heart. Though the great prophet knew that these servants of God were cursed under the Law, he gratefully ate of their

provision. There were no questions, no moments of caution, but instead he simply gave thanks and partook, quietly appreciating the tender hand of his God.

The great prophet was being made to look beyond the Law (Rom. 14:14; *cf.* Deut. 14:3) to a new epoch to be established through "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14; 12:11). It is evident that God was declaring to all that if He so desires He will select even the unclean things of this life, gather them in His arms and bring them to glory. This very lesson was to be learnt by the Apostle Peter, who would hear a great voice utter the words, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:15); and this same lesson would soon be appreciated by Elijah after his experience with the Gentile widow and her son at Zarephath.

Yet let us not fail to appreciate the extent of this miracle, for ravens themselves have difficulty in finding food, yet they provided bountifully for this man of the desert: "Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat" (Job 38:41). This is a powerful illustration of Samson's riddle being unravelled before the prophet's eyes: "Out of the eater came forth meat" (Judg. 14:14). The ravens would have brought the meat fragment by fragment, together constituting a wholesome meal. Only together, in perseverance, could the ravens possibly supply a sufficient and satisfying meal for Elijah. This is certainly a lesson in the necessity of working together in His purpose. Let us take heed.

So, each day, Elijah would sup from the brook and eat of the fragments of food which he had received from God's servants of the air. God's natural and supernatural provisions were both used to preserve this man by the brook. But why did God not choose to supply water in a miraculous way when the brook dried up, as He had done previously with the food? A whole multitude of means were available to the Father, such as the way He had brought water out of the rock (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:10,11), or how He had assisted Samson in bringing forth water out of a jawbone (Judg. 15:18,19). Yet not even for His elect messenger did God make an unnecessary miracle. The prophet was being taught that God chooses as He finds fit. Let us bring to mind the sobering Divine principle: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways" (Isa. 55:8).

[\(To be continued\)](#)