

2. ELIJAH'S HEAVENLY PROVIDER

1 Kings 17v2-9

George Muller is remembered as a remarkable man of faith. His one great aim, which he never lost sight of says his biographer (A.T. Pierson) was "to prove to all men that it is safe to trust only in the living God." Elijah's story is like that. Today's text shows God providing for him in a difficult season.

Elijah's God is our God. He is our Heavenly Provider too, supremely in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. So what was God providing for Elijah? And what might that have to say to you and me today?

1. God was providing a hiding place for Elijah.

v2, 3: Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.

Why was Elijah to hide? You will recall that Elijah has stormed into the palace of King Ahab to announce judgment in the form of prolonged drought. This would have made him public enemy number one. Jezebel the wicked wife of Ahab, would have been especially incensed. In the light of this it seems pretty obvious why Elijah needed to hide.

Yet, the great Bible commentator Matthew Henry writes: "*God bade him go and hide himself by the brook Cherith, This was intended, not so much for his preservation, for it does not appear that Ahab immediately sought his life, but as a judgment to the people. When God intended to send rain upon the earth then he bade Elijah go and show himself to Ahab*"

That may be so. Nevertheless, safety would still be a big factor. Jezebel would have had her agents looking for Elijah, and the people would soon have turned against him; after all, wasn't he the one responsible for their misery? So God provided a hiding place for Elijah.

However the real place of safety was not so much the Kerith Ravine, but God Himself. Elijah was being invited to trust God through a time of great danger and uncertainty.

That doesn't always mean you escape hardship. If you haven't read Corrie Ten Boom's book 'The Hiding Place' you really should. It was written back in 1971 but it is a Christian classic. It tells the story of a family of Dutch believers who hid Jewish refugees from the Nazis in a secret room in their house. But when it was discovered they too ended up facing the horrors of Ravensbrook. The book title, "The Hiding Place", is not so much a reference to their secret room but to God Himself. He sustained Corrie Ten Boom through the horrors of the concentration camp,

God Himself is our hiding place. As a small boy I recall looking at my late father's Army New Testament. Inside the cover the hymn "Rock of Ages" was

printed. "Rock of ages, cleft for me; let me hide myself in Thee." I didn't know what it meant, but it fascinated me. I think I know now.

God invites us to make Him our refuge. For the Christian this is usually spoken of in terms of being "in Christ". We are safe, for eternity. Our life is now "hidden with Christ in God." This may seem very different from Elijah's hiding place at Kerith, but it is part of the same stream. God provides a hiding place - Himself.

2. God was providing for Elijah's daily needs

v4: You will drink from the brook,

God sent him to a brook. Elijah was learning about trusting God to provide his basic needs through the years of drought & famine. In the wilderness the Israelites had been given manna from heaven on a daily basis. Those who tried to hoard it found it decayed. So too Elijah would be provided for on a day to day basis. Jesus taught us to pray in the same way for our basic needs; "Give us this day our daily bread".

Elijah had been enrolled in a school of faith where he needed to trust God for his daily bread. When a young man from Barnsley called Hudson Taylor realized his life's work would be sharing the gospel in China, he immediately enrolled in the same school of faith. He decided he needed to learn to live by faith while in England, because he would certainly need to do so in China. Like Muller he decided to trust God alone. He wrote: "When I go out to China" I thought to myself, *"I shall have no claim on any one for anything. My only claim will be on God. How important to learn, before leaving England, to move man through God by prayer alone."* (Hudson Taylor by Dr. & Mrs Howard Taylor. Vol.1. Chapter X 'From Faith to Faith' p131.)

I suspect this is a vital foundation when we go church planting. Pioneers have to enrol in this school of faith, trusting God. We see the same in Jesus' training his disciples for their future mission. Luke 10v42. *"When I sent you without purse, belt or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing" they answered.* (See also Matthew. 6v25 re. food, drink, clothing. Don't be anxious. Your Heavenly Father knows what you need. Seek first the Kingdom - and these will be yours as well.)

This is all; very well, but what about when the brook dries up?

v6...and he drank from the brook. v7: Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Not many of us avoid this. All of us can remember times when the brook has dried up. This too seems to be on the syllabus in the school of faith. Has God failed Elijah, or led him up the garden path, or provided for a time then abandoned him? Here is a test for Elijah's faith. We know how he must have felt. We follow God's directions and yet He appears to leave us high and dry. For some this may be a health issue, or work, or finances; when relocating to be involved in pioneering it may be complications in selling your house or finding a new one. For others it may be issues with children, or parents or other family members.

v8,9: Then the word of the LORD came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." We don't know how long Elijah waited before God spoke again. God would now provide in a different way.

In the early church God set in motion a radically different way. i.e. sharing everything in common. (Acts 2v45; 4v35.) One of my friends, and the leader of a newfrontiers church in Bracknell, is Ben Davies. Some years back he led the church into a huge building programme which caused everyone to look carefully at their level of commitment. Gift days became a regular occurrence; many of the church members double tithed for several years; others went without holidays or sold possessions. There were some times when the brook seemed to have dried up and people's faith faltered! I remember him telling me about their discussions over what to call the new building. He joked that at one time they could have chosen "The church in the red!" Eventually they went for the Kerith Centre from our text this morning.

Elijah's experience at Kerith was that God was his Heavenly Provider.

3. God was providing for Elijah in an extraordinary way.
v4-6: and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.

Ravens! They were more likely to plunder from Elijah rather than provide for him. God asked him to believe that ravens would feed him. Elijah was learning about trusting God to provide in strange and remarkable ways.

v6. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. Ravens are accustomed to inhospitable terrain e.g. cliffs, woods & crags on valley sides, mountains & moors. They use communal roosts, usually in groups up to a hundred. But at an exceptional food source they flock in great numbers. They mainly feed on dead sheep - which would have been plentiful in a time of drought. This would have been the meat Elijah dined on. But there was bread as well. The meat was miraculous but understandable, but bread was both miraculous and a total mystery.

Strange indeed! David Brainerd, who worked among north American Indians, writes in his journal of sheltering from a ferocious storm inside a great tree in the forest for three days, during which time squirrels brought him food. Sometimes God provides for us in the strangest of ways.

Elijah is remembered more for Mount Carmel than the brook at Kerith. But Kerith had to come before Carmel. Elijah was learning big lessons, shut in with God; totally reliant on God. He was being shaped like clay in the potter's hands.

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