

## 1 Kings 17:1-6

<sup>1</sup>Elijah from Tishbe, one of the settlers in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As surely as the LORD lives, the God of Israel before whom I stand, there will be no dew or rain during the coming years, except at my word.”

<sup>2</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>3</sup>“Leave this place and turn east. Hide yourself by the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>4</sup>You will drink from the stream, and I will command the ravens to provide for you there.”

<sup>5</sup>So Elijah went and did just as the LORD had said. He lived in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>6</sup>The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening, and he drank from the stream.

## The God Who Provides

### I.

Perhaps it was the supply chain issue that increased our usage of phrases like “farm to table,” and “buy local.” While such phrases and concepts are not new, they seem to have become buzzwords more recently.

Millennia ago there wasn’t much choice. Only from a certain distance was it reasonable to expect to obtain the needed supplies like grain and other foodstuffs. Most food was grown locally. Farm to table wasn’t a popular buzzword—it was an essential part of life.

Food is important. For life to continue, food is not an option—it is vital. Much time and energy and effort went into making sure there would be an adequate food supply. Part of the process was to choose appropriate gods.

Ancient people believed in a plurality of gods rather than one God. Each god, they believed, had a narrow band of responsibility. One God wouldn’t be able to handle *all* the areas of life, so they had to choose several.

By the time of today’s First Reading, God’s people Israel had split into two kingdoms—the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. All the kings in the northern kingdom of Israel were described as evil. One of those kings was Ahab. The chapter before our Reading says of him: “Ahab... committed more evil in the eyes of the LORD than all those who had gone before him” (1 Kings 16:30, EHV).

Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, believed they had chosen perfectly serviceable gods for the different parts of their specific needs. Baal was the rain god. He would make sure the rains came at the right times so crops could grow. Asherah was the fertility goddess. She was chosen as a supplemental, related god, to make sure crops and animals—and people—were fertile. The decision had been made long before. Baal and Asherah. Never had these two gods failed them—there was always enough to eat.

Onto that scene bursts the prophet Elijah with no preamble. Usually Scripture introduces a prophet by saying something like: “The Word of the Lord came to...” Not in this case. With no introduction other than his name comes the pronouncement of Elijah to King Ahab: “As surely as the LORD lives, the God of Israel before whom I stand, there will be no dew or rain during the coming years, except at my word” (1 Kings 17:1, EHV).

How do you think his words were met? Were there snickers with Ahab and each of the courtiers holding one hand in front of their faces? Or was it, perhaps, outright laughter and derision? No God was powerful enough to stop the rain. No prophet could make such a bold assertion.

### II.

People these days are much more sophisticated than Ahab and Jezebel and the people they led. We don't look to a bunch of different gods to smile down on us and bless their individual areas of expertise.

People of today are sophisticated enough to know that we have everything under our own control. Meteorologists explain to us in great detail what is going on with the current weather. Prognosticators declare with certainty what is going to happen with the climate decades from now and what impact we are having and could have by our own actions to control it. This despite the fact that they have changed their minds multiple times in the last 100 years about which way the climate is changing; all the while declaring that the actions of mankind are responsible for the swings in climate. Human beings and our technology will control the climate—we don't need many gods or even One all-powerful God to take care of it.

Most people, of course, don't have such a broad, overarching view of things. Most people are concerned only about things under their more immediate control. Even while they profess a belief in the God of the Bible, many look to themselves and their own abilities as being responsible for their well-being. They forget that it is God who provides for us. It is God who gives us the strength and the intelligence and the fortitude to earn a living.

### III.

I can imagine the laughter dying down after Elijah delivered his warning. He turned and walked away. "Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>3</sup>Leave this place and turn east. Hide yourself by the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan" (1 Kings 17:2-3, EHV).

You have probably never given much thought to Elijah's name. Unless you know your Hebrew the meaning doesn't just jump out at you. His name means: "My God is Jaweh." In most English translations of the Bible you will find God's proper name written as "the LORD" with all capital letters or small capitals.

The name Jaweh, "The LORD" indicates the Savior-God. Jaweh is the God who promised the Messiah to come. He is the God who preserved his people despite the times they turned away from him in unbelief because it was through the line of David that Jesus would be born.

This was the God under whose banner Elijah had pronounced that there would be no rain until he gave the word. This is the God who *is* powerful enough in and of himself to not have a narrow band of responsibility; he is the God who created all things. Without him and his preservation, nothing would prosper.

No rain in the land meant a certain lack of prospering. The most recent drought conditions around here lasted 2 months and farmers were feeling the pinch and worrying about their crops. That comes even with modern irrigation equipment. Jesus reported the length of the famine brought by Elijah's pronouncement from the Lord this way: "The sky was shut for three years and six months, while a great famine came over all the land" (Luke 4:25, EHV).

In next week's First Reading Elijah believes he is the only believer left in the land of Israel, but God has to inform him that there were still 7,000 who did not follow Baal, but believed in the true God (1 Kings 19:14, 18). That 3½ year famine affected the 7,000 believers as well as the unbelievers in the land of Israel.

But the true God—the God who made all things and preserves all things—the God who promised to send a Savior from sin into the world—can preserve life even in the midst of drought and famine. He did it to preserve alive the line of the Savior in the days before Israel was enslaved in Egypt by having Joseph prepare for the years of famine. In today's

Gospel he did it by Jesus feeding more than 5,000 souls with only a few fish and loaves of bread.

Here God promises Elijah: “Leave this place and turn east. Hide yourself by the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>4</sup>You will drink from the stream, and I will command the ravens to provide for you there” (1 Kings 17:3-4, EHV).

When you read this in your Bible history studies in the past did you stop and think about these verses? We don’t know for certain where this Kerith Ravine lies. Perhaps there were some resources there other than the water to drink, but God promised to send ravens twice a day to supply Elijah with food. Does that surprise you? Ravens are scavengers. They aren’t known for friendliness to people. Certainly they would be extremely unlikely to bring food day after day, twice a day, to one man living in a ravine. Yet they did. They did it at the command of the powerful Savior-God.

What does that tell you about God’s care for his people? Remember that next week you will hear God declare that he has reserved for himself 7,000 believers. These believers, too, were preserved through the time of drought. God’s Word promises that he will always be with you, no matter what circumstances you find yourself in. God will never leave you or forsake you.

Paul said in today’s Second Reading: “He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight... <sup>7</sup>In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight” (Ephesians 1:4, 7-8, EHV). That’s the most important of all God’s works of preservation. Jaweh, Elijah’s God and yours, carried through on his promise to send a Savior from sin. Your forgiveness has been paid for by the blood of the Lord Jesus. You have heaven to look forward to.

#### IV.

“So Elijah went and did just as the LORD had said. He lived in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>6</sup>The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening, and he drank from the stream” (1 Kings 17:5-6, EHV). Elijah trusted in the Lord to provide. He followed God’s instructions; so did the ravens, who brought him his daily bread, just as God had promised him.

The verses after today’s Reading show that eventually the stream dried up. God sent him to the widow at Zarephath, where he was kept alive yet again. In that case, a woman who lived in Baal country preserved alive the prophet of the true God until it was time for the drought to end. Again and again the Savior-God demonstrates he is the God who provides.

Next week’s reading will remind you that Elijah had moments of doubt, just as you do. Continue to focus on the sure promises of God, which never fail. He *will* be there for you. Even when *you* think he’s not acting the way you might like, God knows your needs and will provide for you.

Most importantly of all, God has given you the forgiveness of Jesus and will preserve you eternally with him. Keep your focus there, no matter what the situation in this life might be.

Remember all the ways “My God is Jaweh” has provided for you in the past, and trust that God will continue to provide for you until he brings you to your heavenly home. Amen.