

Elijah

Part 3

The Brook Dries Up

1 Kings 17

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Last time we looked at the way in which climate was obedient to God and Creatures – in particular ravens - were obedient to God and how God began to use Elijah in His plans to turn the hearts of Israel away from worshipping the false gods Baal and Asherah and back towards the true God who had brought their ancestors out of captivity in Egypt and into the land of Canaan.

You will remember that Elijah (who was sickened by the worship of the false Gods and all the abominable stuff that went with it) had dropped the news to Ahab king of Israel that there would be neither dew nor rain until Elijah said so. God then told Elijah to hide in the Kerith ravine where he could drink from the brook and be fed by the ravens morning and evening. I believe that one reason why the Lord told Elijah to go to the Kerith and not to some other ravine was because the word “Kerith” is not just a name but a name with meaning.

Kerith is derived from the Hebrew word Karath OT:3772 (*pronounced cawrath*) one of the meanings of which is “to cut” in particular “to covenant or make an agreement” which was originally done by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces. (*a primitive root; to cut (off, down or asunder); by implication, to destroy or consume; specifically, to covenant (i.e. make an alliance or bargain, originally by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces): (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.)*)

That happened in Genesis 15 where God make a covenant with Abraham to give his desendants the promised land. *The unspoken implication was that if the covenant was broken, then the offender would become like the animal. It is thought that from this ceremony is derived the common Hebrew idiom karat berît - "to cut a covenant" (Gen. 15:18; Jer. 34:18) (Hillers, 1969:41). Whatever the original derivation of the term it seems to have meant simply "to make a covenant" (Nicholson, 1986: 102).*

As mentioned last time Kerith was not a dry old desert place but wooded and pleasant. Though it might not be our idea of comfort in the 21st century, Elijah was fed morning and night and had water to drink whereas, in some places in Israel where he had run from, many would already be suffering the effect of drought. When Christians are in a place of relative comfort it can be rather easy make agreements –cut covenants - with God to do things without much thought about the consequences. You sometimes hear people do it. When a person is comfortably off and the future is looking rosy it can be easy to let things slip out like:-

“Father, even if you took *everything* I had, I would still serve you, Father, and still rejoice in the Lord”.

Well the Lord is a covenant making God and He likes covenants. There’s just something to bear in mind. After Kerith, the Lord may send us to Zarephath like He did Elijah. Like Kerith, Zarephath is not just a place name but a place name with a meaning. It was an area where there were glass making furnaces and Zarephath means “refinement” and is derived from a word meaning to “refine” either literally or figuratively.

One of the consequences of making covenants is that a time of refining may follow. Peter discovered that after he'd said to the Lord that he would follow Him to prison or to death even if all the others deserted.

33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." 34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." 35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. Matt 26:33-35 NIV (See also Luke 22:33)

Shortly after that, after the Lord Jesus had been arrested, Peter found himself next to a refining fire in the courtyard of the high priest's palace. There he was put to the test and didn't do well.

Being enthusiastic and wanting to serve the Lord sacrificially resulted in the Lord challenging me to join the early morning prayer meeting at the church I was at in those days. It was on a Sunday morning and I think it began at seven or seven thirty. This was my Zarephath. I joined the two others who went and, therefore increased the attendance by fifty percent. We sat in a triangle. The intention was to petition heaven with boldness and confidence. Three forceful men advancing the kingdom of heaven and setting out to rattle satan's cage. But it wasn't always like that. Of course, at that time on Sunday, we were not all wide awake and sometimes it was a hard to keep focused. All in all, I don't think I lived up to the challenge particularly well.

There's a principle here to bear in mind when agreeing things with God. Here it is:-

Deut 23:21

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not be slack in paying it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and slackness would be sin in you. AMP.

Again in Eccl 5:4-5

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. 5 It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. NIV

The sending of Elijah to Zarephath corresponded with a time that the brook Elijah was using as his water supply dried up.

Brook Dried Up

The brook dried up because there had been no rain. It is easy to skip over this statement because it's obvious that brooks dry up in a drought. However, there are lessons to be learned.

For example. Brooks don't stop running like water from a tap which is turned off. It takes a while as the flow slows down, then becomes a trickle and then stops and finally dries up.

When I was a boy, a group of us would occasionally build a dam across a brook close to where we all lived. The fun was not just watching the water level increase upstream of the dam but some of us would run downstream to see how far downstream the flow had reduced. There was plenty of water available. It's just that a blockage had stopped it flowing. The real fun was waiting for the water to reach to top of the dam and then breaking up the dam and watching the water pour through.

We used to have a bird table in our garden on top of a wooden log stuck in the ground. Over time the log went rotten and needed to be replaced. One Sunday morning I looked out of the window at fellowship and saw a man cutting off tree branches just across the way. After the meeting I asked the man for a small log, took one home and put it in the shed intending to replace the rotten one. I left it there for a week or so and, to my surprise, when I went to use it, new shoots a few inches long had sprouted from the side of the log. It was amazing. It was like Aaron's rod that budded! There was still life in the log even though it was cut from the tree. However, the shoots didn't last long and eventually died. In Ps 1:3 we read about the man who delights in the law of the Lord who is like:-

..... a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. NIV

However, the tree won't stay green for long if its depends on water in the river and the river dries up.

Christians Running Dry

So what am I saying here? Where a Christian has become used to spending time with the Lord in quiet times and in fellowship during the day it will show. The Christian will enjoy a relationship with God and a spiritual flow will occur as the Holy Spirit passes like a brook through the Christian and spills over to others in church, on the street, in the office and so on. However, should that person cease doing that and even decide to turn away from Christian fellowship, then the Holy Spirit flow will slow down and gradually leak until the spiritual brook dries up.

Instead of being a person overflowing, say, with the love and peace of God, the person begins to change and, over time, may become bitter and critical. I met one at a funeral last year. He used to be an enthusiastic Christian years ago but he had left the church and as he spoke to me he was critical of church in general, bitter and critical of church leaders in general and to say that there was a notable loss of enthusiasm and interest in living for the Lord is an understatement.

It's been said that when a Christian turns away from spending time with God and other Christians, there isn't a sudden blow-out and collapse in their Christian witness but rather a slow leak as the fullness of the Spirit ebbs away almost imperceptibly until the person becomes gradually more distanced from things associated with the Christian life which were once embraced and loved. We should never think that it couldn't happen to us. There is a scripture which reads as follows:-

**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1
Cor 10:12 NIV**

The Holy Spirit is a river of God's love, joy and peace which will never run dry but we need to draw on Him often, daily even, to keep that spiritual river flowing. You may say "Well that all sounds very spiritual but in practical terms what do you do? Practically it means coming before God in the quiet of your room – and if you want to speak to God He'll always listen - just be quiet before him, happy to be in His presence and then say "Lord, I just want you to fill me up with Your Holy Spirit and flow through me to others I meet so that they will feel a sense of Your presence, and Your love flowing through me to them". Just converse with God in that way. That is not hard to do and it's what God wants because. In John 7:37-38 Jesus says:-

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink . 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." NIV

The key is going to the Lord, asking for and receiving fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit, looking for opportunities to share with others what God gives us and then going back to the Lord for more.

The Word of The Lord

Once the brook dried up Elijah, who was no doubt still praying for the drought to continue, heard God tell him to move on.

1 Kings 17:8-9

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." NIV

So the word of the Lord came to Elijah and in some way, God conveyed His word to widow in Zarephath. God commanded her but we don't know how. The word in the Hebrew translated "commanded" can also mean "send a messenger" and maybe that's the way God did it.

The Lord speaks to us in various ways. Through the mind, through a vision, through circumstances, through another person, through the words of a song, through the Bible if you are blessed to be able to read it, through media such as Christian books, tapes, TV and videos.

In the days of the very early church it is unlikely that a speaker in any Christian meeting would have had access to scrolls of scripture to read out. To read out a passage and speak on it could well have been very unusual. It's even more unlikely that the mass of believers would have had any kind of bound volume of scripture like we have. I can imagine that much of what the early Jewish Christians knew from the OT scriptures had been learned off by heart as part of their schooling. In fact, if Peter, John or the other apostles had asked the leaders of local synagogues if they could just borrow the scrolls for a meeting of the followers of Jesus, they would have been shown the door. It's good to learn scripture off by heart. Many times I've sensed the Lord bring

back to mind a scripture I'd learned years before just at the time I needed to hear it.

Just as an aside, we really are very blessed to have Bibles – even numerous different versions - and all the other study tools that go with them. It is not that long ago when only the privileged in this country could read and some of *them* positively discouraged the servants and labourers on their estates from learning to read in case they rose above their station. I have two birth certificates in my family tree dated 1850 and 1851 where the mother and father were both laborers and signed the birth certificates with a cross because they couldn't read or write their names – and that wasn't uncommon then. Just over 150 years ago. Even now, I understand there are about five million adults in this country who can't read. So if we have Bibles and can read them, that is something we should truly appreciate and treasure for, at the very least, our Bibles make available to each us a channel through which God will speak to us personally. As I've said a number of times before, the idea of reading a chapter a day from the Bible is a relatively modern concept but one that we should treasure and not take for granted.

Sometimes we can hear the word of the Lord through another person who is talking to us without the person even realizing that they are passing on words that God wants us to hear. The person is just a channel through whom God's words just slip through.

Next time we'll look at Elijah's move to Zarephath