GOD’S KEEPING GRACE

I Kings 17:2 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. 4 And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. 5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. 6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. 7 And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

Elijah has left the king’s presence. He has told Ahab in no uncertain terms, v.1 As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. … He reminded the king who the kingdom belonged to, - it was not Ahab’s kingdom, or Jezebel’s, - it was Jehovah’s kingdom. Israel was, - and still is, - God’s prized possession … the LORD God of Israel. And notice also the difference God emphasized between Himself and the idols, - He is the Lord God Who liveth! … He is the King of kings, and the nation still belongs to Him!

When it was realised the words of the prophet were coming to pass, - there shall not be dew nor rain these years (v.1), - … the drought had come upon the land, Queen Jezebel began her campaign to wipe out Elijah and all the prophets of the Lord (18:4). As far as she was concerned, it was God and His spokesmen who were to blame for the drought! It wasn’t her fault, or her husband’s, or the people’s! It was God’s fault, and those prophets of His! They were holding back progress, and they were keeping the nation from moving forward! They had to be removed from the land, and the sooner the better! … How the enemy hates and despises the people of God!

Three hundred and twenty-six years ago this month 224 men and women were imprisoned in the Tolbooth that used to be in the High Street in Burntisland. What was their crime? Their crime was they stood for God’s supremacy in the Covenanting cause, - they refused to acknowledge the king’s authority in spiritual matters. In May 1685, they were marched up to Donnottar Castle near Stonehaven and imprisoned in the ‘Whig’s Vault’. They were kept there for three months under deplorable conditions. Those who survived were marched the long distance back to Burntisland, before being sent across to Leith and on to slave labour in the West Indies. Many died on the journey.

Throughout history, and up until the present day, God’s people have been hated and despised … and there is unparalleled persecution today, more than ever there has been at any other time in history … and governments are aware of it, and yet, - for the sake of political expediency, - the matter is ignored.
Please turn to Rev. 12 where you will find a picture of the increasing persecution of God’s people … and if you look carefully you will see an Old Testament picture. We read, v.15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood, - he was intent on destroying her! That which comes out of his mouth is polluted and vile. This woman who is his target is the Beloved of the Lord and we further read, v.16 the earth [Ps. 24:1 ... is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof] helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. When did we first see such an incident in Scripture? … Remember the children of Israel as they made their exodus from bondage in Egypt … as the sea opened up for them, - the earth helped the woman, - then we read of how the same earth that helped God’s people swallowed up in the mighty flood of the Red Sea the ‘dragon’s’ armies!

Yes, Isaiah wrote … Is. 59:19 When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. … Ahab and Jezebel were flexing their considerable muscle and the faithful remnant of God bore the brunt of their wickedness. Into this battlefield, God called His servant, Elijah.

We have already considered his background, and how he was, - to many, - of no particular significance … and yet, he was the man God called to meet the need of the hour. Someone has wisely coined the phrase, “The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot keep us and care for us.” … We see this great truth displayed in how the Lord sustained and kept Elijah.

**THE LORD’S PROTECTION**  
v.2 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

A flood of evil had broken loose. The walls keeping in the polluted waters of Ahab and Jezebel’s reservoir of hatred had broken and the faithful people of God were about to be engulfed in a mighty deluge … or so the king and queen had planned (cf. Rev. 12:15). Notice how Elijah recognised the times were dark, And the word of the LORD came unto him … What does that mean? It means that Elijah was steeped in prayer before God, and he could see the dilemma from Heaven’s point of view. He had no other shelter into which to run. When all around him was travelling further and further away from God Elijah was redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). …
He was in the quiet place with God. He had not given in to the so-called inevitable, as some would have drawn the conclusion. Neither had he yet gone into the wilderness. He was still in Samaria. The Lord called him from Gilead to the court of the king, and then when he had finished giving his short message there, he retired from the court of the king … but he stayed in Samaria! Why is that so important to notice? It is important to notice because here we see a man that did not move until the Lord told him to move!

So often we are in a hurry. We think we know what we should be doing and we don’t take time to seek the Lord concerning it … but before Elijah did anything we find him in the place where the word of the LORD came unto him. … When you have decisions to make, where does your planning begin? Does it begin in the presence of the Lord? Do you ask Him what way you should go? … So many Christians take directions in life, only to find they need to back-track because the path along which they travelled was the wrong path. … Here we find Elijah, and before he went anywhere else, he came before the Lord, ready for and listening to His will, … Ps. 32:8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

He belonged to the Lord, and he was under God’s protection. The promise Jacob was given in Bethel was the promise Elijah trusted in also, Gen. 28:15 behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest. The Lord gave him three commands: the first concerned direction (Get thee hence); the second concerned direction (turn thee eastward); and the third also concerned direction (and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan).

You are not to stay here any longer, you have been with the enemy long enough, Get thee hence! You have been with Ahab who knew the truth from the days of his fathers, but he exchanged it for the error of following after the idols of a woman he should never have married! … Get thee hence! I believe this is a timely word for our fellowship, especially following the decision we made on Wednesday evening. God’s people have no place in an environment where His glorious truth is compromised and undermined. … Get thee hence! By the way, this word ‘hide’ [rt;S' cathar {saw-thar’}] does not mean to run scared, it means to ‘absent yourself’, to ‘get away’ … as is described in Ps. 74:9 there is no more any prophet. God had left them for a time. Elijah had gone away, and hidden himself from them.
... And so he left Samaria ... but he did not go just anywhere ... he went to where the Lord led him. Surely anywhere would have been safer than the idolatrous city of Samaria? ... However, if Elijah had gone north, he would have been travelling in the wrong direction. If he had gone south, he would have been travelling in the wrong direction. ... And if he had gone west, he would have been travelling in the wrong direction. ... We must not travel any other direction than the direction the Lord commands us to go.

Which direction was the most unappealing? ... Probably the direction God commanded His servant to take. Lord, why go east? Lord, why take me into the desert? Lord, why take me to the nothing and to the nobody? Surely I can do more for You somewhere else ... but Lord, in a wilderness?!!

Do you ever think like that? Why has the Lord me here in this small fellowship? Why has He me not in some exciting venture where I could see something substantial being accomplished?! ... Tell me, - you know the story of Elijah’s life, - where and when did he ever enjoy the exciting company of a great crowd of people worshiping God? Never, and yet he was one of the mightiest spokesmen of God in the Bible! ... Indeed, he along with Moses was given the privilege to meet the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But there is a reason why he went east ... East is the direction from which the sun rises ... looking forward to a new dawn. Malachi describes the meaning of the promise as to why he should look eastward, 4:2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. ... That is the direction the light comes from, and that is where his hope lay!

The Lord’s protection was upon Elijah as he left Samaria, - for the time being, his duty was done there, his time there was finished for now, - ... and the Lord’s protection upon him continued now as he turned eastward and went to the little brook Cherith, just on this side of the River Jordan.

Yes, look at Cherith. It might conjure up a beautiful picture in your mind, but it was nothing more than a trickle of water in the wilderness. For how long would it contain sufficient to satisfy Elijah’s thirst? ... Long enough, he would discover ... until the Lord led him on from that place. Phil. 4:19 my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
The main river that attracted most people, of course, was the River Jordan … but here is a little stream, hidden in the wilderness, where the Lord brought His servant and protected him from the wickedness of the enemy. … It makes me think again of the promise of God in the last days when the dragon is cast into the earth and he persecutes the woman in Rev. 12. We read, v.14 to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. … (Elijah was also in the wilderness for 3½ years, cf. James 5:17) … In a previous age, - to which I have already alluded, - the Lord had also said to Moses, Ex. 19:4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, - the Lord had also said to Moses, Ex. 19:4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself … and I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt (Ex. 16:32).

… “The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot keep us and care for us.” … The Lord’s Protection.

The Lord’s Provision v.4 And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. 5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. 6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. Notice the repetition, - v.4 the brook … v.5 the brook … v.6 the brook. That was the place in the will of God for Elijah to be, - … the brook … nowhere else!

Nothing worthwhile for God in Elijah’s life could have been done anywhere else, but at the brook. What would he have been doing at the brook? I believe you find the answer in v.2 … he was in that place where we previously found him, - alone with God, - searching out the mind of God for how he must proceed in those evil days. James 5:17 supports this; it tells us he was a man who prayed earnestly. He did not know where to go next, but he trusted God to know … and he prayed earnestly. Once again, Ps. 32:8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. A.W. Pink remarked, “Prayer in private was the source of his power in public”. Yes, he knew God, and he knew the presence of God.

Look again at the brook. Its waters were not the waters the enemy drank from. Ahab and Jezebel would not have known anything about Cherith! Cherith would have been too insignificant for them! They were used to drinking from other more well-known sources … but not the source God brought His servant to. … In the same way, you and I drink from a different source to what the world drinks.
The Song of Solomon describes it as a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters (4:15). It is that pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1) … the waters the Lord Jesus offered to the woman of Samaria, Jn. 4:14 whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

What can you get from the waters the Lord gives you to drink that you cannot get from any other waters? When you drink from His source He promises this, Is. 40:29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: 31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. … While the king was suffering drought, the Lord’s servant was drinking from the brook. You see, that was another reason he had to leave Samaria. If he had stayed in Samaria he would have been like all the rest of the population, - he would have suffered from the drought. He had to move away … he had to get out! Yes, don’t we see the wisdom of God here too, II Cor. 6:17 come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

The upshot of God withdrawing His word and His servant from the people was that there was a terrible famine in the land … but underlying it, there was a worse famine, the likes of which Amos refers to, 8:11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: 12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.

When you hear religious men and women debate and discuss such abominations as those which God condemns in His Word … as took place in Edinburgh last Monday … then you recognise the great spiritual famine and the great spiritual need all around us today … the great famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

In the midst of it all, we see the Lord’s provision for His own dear people. We are here today, not because of how much or how little we have in our church bank accounts, … we are here because it is the will of God that we are down at the brook Cherith and He is sustaining and keeping us. It is not by men and women’s gifts, but by God’s grace we are being kept!
We daren’t move from this place until He instructs us … and it is in the place of prayer we need to be! I have in my mind a romantic picture of what Cherith would be like. I see somewhere quiet and idyllic out in the wilderness, a gentle stream flowing, and nobody to bother you … But that was not how it was, - God brought Elijah out into the wilderness to train him for the days ahead.

Cherith was not a ‘safe retreat’ or some form of ‘sabbatical’ … It wasn’t somewhere to hide in case he got caught by the hunting armies of Queen Jezebel. No, God removed Elijah from the people as a judgment upon them, - He had stopped speaking with them for that time, - and God was calling Elijah to separation. The man of God was being shaped and formed for the days ahead. He could have nothing to do with what was going on in Samaria.

**CONCLUSION**

Our time has gone. We have not finished with these six verses. There remains more practical truth in them for us. We have embarked on a new journey in this past week. In our studies the Lord is calling us into the wilderness, and to the brook Cherith. Remember there is nothing wrong with the wilderness; it was in the wildernesses that God drew closer to His people and provided for them. There might not seem to be all that much in the wilderness, but there was actually more in the wilderness than there was in the king’s palace! … Yes, the Lord provides enough spiritual water for us to keep drinking … and the ravens (… we shall look at them in our next study also), they are under orders from the Creator to feed Elijah there.

**The Lord’s protection and the Lord’s provision** … As I say, we shall come back again and look at the Lord’s provision, before we look at the Lord’s providence, v.7 And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

These are great lessons for us here, if you are willing to come out with us into the wilderness and be hidden with God by the brook Cherith. You will find you will neither go thirsty or hungry. You will find yourself depending more and more upon God. That is not to say you know what is ‘around the corner’ … what it does mean though is that, - like Elijah, - we are confident of this, “The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot keep us and care for us.” This then is the privilege we enjoy, - **God’s keeping grace.**