RAVENS, RIVERS, & A WIDOW

(THE LORD WHO PROVIDES) | MIRACLES

INTRO

Miracles of Provision: Creating, Multiplying, Transforming, Sustaining, or Directing (22)

God's miraculous provision in Scripture takes several forms. Sometimes He creates provision where there was no source at all, multiplies a small amount into more than enough, or transforms what was bitter, toxic, or ordinary into something good. At other times He sustains ordinary things far beyond their natural limits, or directs His creation, from ravens to fish, to deliver what His people need.

Old Testament (16)

- Marah's bitter water made sweet (Ex 15:23-25)
- Manna (Ex 16; ceases at Josh 5:12)
- Quail, first time (Ex 16:13)
- Quail, second time (Num 11:31)
- Water from the rock at Rephidim (Ex 17:6)
- Water from the rock at Meribah (Num 20:11)
- Israel's clothes and sandals do not wear out for 40 years (Deut 8:4; 29:5; Neh 9:21)
- Water for Samson at Lehi (Judg 15:19)
- Ravens feed Elijah (1 Ki 17:4-6)
- The widow of Zarephath's flour and oil (1 Ki 17:14-16)
- Elijah fed by the angel; one meal carries him 40 days (1 Ki 19:5-8)
- Jericho's spring healed (2 Ki 2:19-22)
- Ditches filled with water without rain (2 Ki 3:16-20)
- The widow's oil multiplied (2 Ki 4:1-7)
- Poisoned stew made safe (2 Ki 4:38-41)
- A hundred men fed with twenty loaves (2 Ki 4:42-44)

New Testament (6)

- Water into wine (Jn 2:1-11)
- The first great catch of fish (Lk 5:1-11)
- Feeding of the 5,000 (Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:30-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-14)
- Feeding of the 4,000 (Mt 15:32-39; Mk 8:1-9)
- The coin in the fish's mouth (Mt 17:24-27)
- The second catch, after the resurrection (Jn 21:1-11)

Today, we'll look at one passage of scripture that contains multiple miracles of provision: 1 Kings 17:1-16. In it we'll see:

- Elijah sustained in a dry, difficult season — a God ordained drought — judgment upon the land.
- Elijah sent to and sustained through unstable, wild, and unlikely sources.
- A gentile widow who finds herself the recipient of God's grace and provision, but only after a sacrificial invitation to trust.

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MAIN SCRIPTURE:

1 Kings 17:1–16 ESV

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom
I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” 2 And the word of the Lord came
to him: 3 “Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the
Jordan. 4 You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” 5 So he went
and did according to the word of the Lord. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan.
6 And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he
drank from the brook. 7 And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. 8 Then
the word of the Lord came to him, 9 “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there.
Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he
came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said,
“Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” 11 And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and
said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” 12 And she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing
baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I
may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” 13 And Elijah said to her, “Do not
fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make
something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be
spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.’ ” 15 And
she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of flour was
not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

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1: GOD’S PURPOSES FOR A DIFFICULT, DRY SEASON

A: ELIJAH SHOWS UP ON THE SCENE TO ANNOUNCE A DROUGHT

- **This supernatural drought is part of the covenant curse.**
  - We often love to talk about covenant blessings
  - But under the old covenant (before Jesus), God’s covenant with Israel also included curses if they rebelled and worshiped other gods/idols.
  - This period of their history reaches new depths of disobedience
  - So according to the covenant, they will be disciplined accordingly: in this case, a drought.
- **Ahab is notoriously one of the worst kings in Israel’s history**
  - Ahab went further than any king before him. Solomon tolerated foreign gods to keep his foreign wives happy. Ahab tried to make Baal a national religion right alongside the Lord.
  - He married into Baal worship when he married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, and began serving Baal himself (1 Kings 16:31).

    - He built Baal an altar and a temple in Israel. He also funded 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Asherah from the royal (Jezebel's) table (1 Kings 18:19). Scripture says he provoked the Lord more than every king before him (1 Kings 16:32-33).
    - If that wasn't enough, God's faithful people were hunted. Jezebel killed the Lord's prophets, and the faithful survivors had to hide in caves (1 Kings 18:4).
    - This period was a fight for Israel's soul and King Ahab "sold himself to do evil" (1 Kings 21:25) and was leading the people astray.
    - Into that darkness, God sends the prophet Elijah to confront the king and remind Israel who the true God really is.
- **The drought was essentially a showdown between the gods.**
    - Which one was real? Which one had power? Which one was the source of provision?
    - Baal was a storm god and worshiped for the rain (provision) he sent upon the land.
    - When Yahweh (through Elijah) announces a drought at His hand — He was publicly exposing and shaming baal as worthless
- **So this supernatural drought had two purposes:**
    - ONE: covenant curse, judgment, discipline for their idolatry—worshipping the false gods
    - TWO: revelation, God is trying to expose baal for what he is and also reveal to Israel that HE is the only One worthy of worship; that He alone is their source of provision.

B: ELIJAH MUST ALSO LIVE THROUGH JUDGMENT

- The question is how will God sustain him (and the other faithful worshippers of Yahweh)?
- I'm reminded that we are not exempt from hardships that come upon the world.
- However, God's children have the promise of His presence with us AND His provision — God will provide ALL that we need!

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2: GOD'S PROVISION THROUGH UNSTABLE & UNLIKELY MEANS

A: GOD SENDS ELIJAH TO THE "BROOK" CHERITH

The Hebrew word behind the english 'brook' is נַחַל | na-hal

- It is often translated:
    - river valley
    - wadi (this is the better idea in this case)
    - stream
    - trench
    - tunnel
    - torrent
- A wadi is a dry riverbed most of the year.
    - It only runs when the winter rains come.
    - When it runs, it roars. In the rainy season, a bone-dry valley can turn into a violent flash flood in a matter of hours. That's why it can be described as a "torrent."

    - When the rains stop, it disappears. Unlike a river or spring that flows all year, a wadi can't be counted on.
    - Job notably compares his unreliable friends to a wadi that's gushing in winter and gone when you need it most (Job 6:15-20).
    - This one Hebrew word (nahal) covers it all. The word can mean wadi, torrent, brook, or river, because the same place looks completely different depending on the season.
- So when God sends Elijah to the wadi, he would've understood the unstable, wild—dangerous, and temporary nature of the provision.
    - Therefore this stop would only be temporary, for the stream in the wadi will run dry eventually because of the drought.

B: GOD COMMANDS THE RAVENS TO FEED HIM

Water from the brook was only one part of the provision and that was from a natural source.

- Q: Where will the food come from? How will God provide food for Elijah to eat in this remote wilderness?
- A: God commanded ravens to bring him bread and meat, morning and evening, until the brook dried up
- This is miraculous provision.
    - What a strange, impossible answer. What angel suggested this idea? It makes no sense to our natural minds, maybe to cinderella.
    - Some commentators in trying to explain the odd means of provision have posited that Elijah saw their roosting spots and scavenged from the scavengers.
    - The problem with that idea is the text plainly says:
        - God commanded the ravens to feed him
        - They *brought (to) him* bread and meat
    - It's clearly miraculous provision, from a very unusual source.

C: GOD SENDS ELIJAH TO THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

- After the wadi predictably dries up, God sends him on, now to a widow in Zarephath.
- Not just any widow
    - A gentile (non-israelite) widow in a foreign land
    - A poor, about to starve to death widow
    - A widow who already has other mouths to feed
- If I'm Elijah I'm asking the Lord:
    - If it must be to a widow, why not a wealthy widow with plenty to share?
    - But really God, why not from a wealthy benefactor that has the means already to provide for me?

D: CONSIDER WHAT GOD IS TEACHING ELIJAH, ALL ISRAEL, AND US TODAY

- God's provision is not bound by our understanding or preferred methods—God can use anything, anyone, anywhere.
- The means of God's provision are just that… the means. God is the true source.
- So the means can, do, and will change, but God is always the source.

- So when our means are threatened, temporary, run dry, seem lacking, and unstable— the real source— our Father is rock solid faithful

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3: GOD'S PROVISION IN UNLIKELY PLACES

I've described the unusual means of God's provision (the what), but now pay attention to the where of His provision.

A: THE BROOK (WADI) IN THE WILDERNESS

- There's all sorts of debate by scholars as to where this wadi was and at the end of the day, there is no conclusive plot on the map that everyone agrees with. Just lots of possibilities.
  - What we can gather is that it was in some sort of remote, wilderness place.
  - Of note: he's on the run from King Ahab. God told Elijah to 'hide yourself.'
  - So Elijah probably found a deep ravine in the wilderness with a brook running through it, out of sight and lost to the world.
- But I pause to stop and consider this wild place as an unlikely location to send the prophet Elijah when thinking through our normal concerns.
  - There's nothing out there to sustain him
  - No nearby city, village, or starbucks to get food.
  - There's also no one out there to protect him or help out if needed. He's alone and exposed.
- So when God sent him there, it HAD to be by miraculous provision and protection.
  - Why not send him to Judah?
  - Why not send him to an enemy nation who wouldn't turn Elijah over?
  - The fact is that God chose the wild place, the remote wilderness for this first stage of provision in the drought.

B: THE WIDOW IN ZAREPHATH

- We've talked about the widow's poverty, but consider her location: Zarephath in Sidon.
- Why is that relevant?
  - Sidon is where Queen Jezebel is from
  - Sidon was pagan land, belonging to baal, in the cultural worldview
- In Ch 18 we read that Ahab has sent to every nation searching for Elijah
  - And here God has hid Elijah in Jezebel's backyard.
- I had supposed 'why not Judah' or 'why not an enemy nation'?
  - I would never have thought to hide Elijah in the most dangerous of all places.
  - A nation of baal worshippers with whom Elijah is in a great conflict.
  - His mission is to expose baal as worthless.
  - This is not friendly territory — this is 'at the table of my enemies' (Psalm 23:5)

C: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE UNLIKELY PLACES OF GOD'S PROVISION?

- When God directs our steps, He can not only provide through unlikely means, He can also sustain us in the most unlikely places.
- He doesn't have to send us to safe places.
- He can provide for us AND protect us in the most dangerous places (Psalm 23:4)
- When God leads, we don't need all the answers up front… we just need to trust and obey!

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4: GOD'S PROVISION COMES THROUGH AN INVITATION TO TRUST

A: GOD CARED FOR ELIJAH, BUT ELIJAH HAD TO OBEY IN ORDER TO RECEIVE GOD'S PROVISION

- God's provision was in the wild, predictably unstable, expiring waters of the wilderness wadi—Elijah had to trust, obey, and go there.
- God's provision was through the morning and evening meal uber'ed by the ravens—Elijah had to receive from some questionable deliveries (I'm sure it didn't look appealing at times)
- God's provision was in asking a Sidonian widow on the brink of starvation for some of her last meal. Elijah had to trust God's voice and believe.
- NOTE: all of these conditions came BECAUSE he was faithful and delivered a prophetic word of judgment on Ahab and the nation.
    - Elijah wasn't in a hardship because he was being disciplined. God's call on him put him in a difficult assignment AND it required him to trust God through it.

B: GOD'S PROVISION FOR THE WIDOW REQUIRED FAITH WORKED OUT THROUGH SACRIFICIAL OBEDIENCE

- **Pause and consider the widow's plight this morning.**
    - She's a woman who has already lost so much (she's a widow).
    - She is living in the same harsh drought and subsequent famine.
    - She has no provider to protect her and look out for her and her household.
    - The last of her flour and oil are going to be baked for her final meal.
    - She and her son are about to starve to death after this.
- **Then Elijah shows up.**
    - He has the audacity to ask not just for her service and hospitality in bringing him water… but for the first portion of her final loaf of bread.
    - What does she do?
- **Somethings to note:**
    - The woman swears by the LORD (Yahweh)
    - She recognizes Elijah and swears by his God.
    - Scholars are divided, but many see (and I agree) that this is in part a confession of faith in the LORD and not baal.
- **This woman, is a God-fearing widow of gentile status in pagan land.**
    - Does God see her too?

- Does God know how to provide for her household in the midst of this famine too?
- The famine brought by the drought is supposed to expose baal as worthless and Yawheh as the true God.
- Will God show His glory over baal by providing for this woman in baal's territory.
- YES to all of those questions… for God is a good God, faithful and true.

- **BUT THERE'S AN ASK.**
  - Sacrificially give the first portion of everything you have.
  - THEN God will provide for you throughout the remainder of the drought.
- **She did… and God did.**
  - She trusted in God's promise of provision.
  - She gave the first portion of all she had left to Elijah
  - God miraculously sustained the flour and oil for all the days of the drought.
  - We know this was for a long time. There's roughly 3 and half years from the beginning to end of the drought, and the wadi probably ran dry sooner than later. (James 5:17)
  - Not only did God provide for Elijah, he provided for this widow, her son, and her whole household. This is abundant provision, but not excess materialism.
  - The idea is that the jar of oil and the container of flour did not run out.

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RESPONSE:

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

- **I find that people often love the idea of God providing for all of their needs.**
  - But we hate the circumstances that require us to lean on God's provision.
  - Many of us would rather skip obeying God (confronting Ahab) if it meant living in the wilderness and eating what the ravens brought us.
  - Many church goers today balk at the idea that God calls us to give… to tithe; God expects us to tithe.
  - Maybe you're asking what does the widow's offering have to do with tithing?
    - She gave the first portion of what she had. That reflects a biblical principle we see throughout the Scripture: honoring God with the first and best rather than simply giving Him whatever is left over. We see that principle expressed in firstfruit offerings and in the practice of tithing.
    - Further she's giving to Elijah as an act of faith toward the LORD. The Lord promised to provide for her.
    - So there's a general parallel between what God asked of this widow and what He asks of us today.
    - Similarly we see God's provision as we step out in faith and tithe.
- **Roger shared a great devotional for our adult midweek.**
  - He talked about trusting God with our future… even in hard times.
  - And he made an application about tithing.
  - Do we trust God enough to tithe?
  - God doesn't NEED our money. God doesn't NEED anything.

- But He asks for our tithe, because He wants us to trust Him.
- He wants our faith worked out into generosity.
- Of note: tithing is not a transaction or a formula.
  - We don't give *to* get
  - We give in obedience. We give as worship. We give in faith. We give, recognizing all we have belongs to God.
  - We give, knowing He will take care of us.

- **Are you in a season where you need God's miraculous provision?**
  - Are you walking in faith?
  - Are you practicing obedience in your finances?
  - Just start where you're at, start small and work towards the full 10% OR better yet.. just go for it.
  - "But what if I won't have enough" — this is the exact thought the widow would've had to overcome in faith.
- **This is the one area where God instructs His people to test Him.**

  Malachi 3:8–10 NIV

  [8] "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. [9] You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. [10] Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.
  - I'm confident that you will discover the Lord's grace upon your lives as you give in faith.
    - When the brook runs dry… The Lord won't
      - When a job changes or a new season of life comes… remember the LORD is your source of provision.
    - If ever a hardship comes on you, especially due to your faithfulness to Him, but if ever there's a drought… God will supply all of your needs.
- **Maybe you're here and:**
  - You are faithful in the tithe
  - God has provided for all your needs
  - But this story reminds you of a time you were in need and how God provided. (We so quickly forget)
  - Share the testimonies of God's goodness to you… we got to hear a few testimonies this past Wednesday and it was great.
  - Consider how God might be challenging you to another measure of generosity. How might God want to use you to meet another's need. (The miracle is often in the house)

"The Lord Will Provide"