

It is so refreshing to forage in the Old Testament! There are always hidden glades and pools which the saints through the ages have discovered and, by the refreshment provided there, have gone into the world fortified with fresh encouragements from the Word of God. How does the hymn put it in our red Trinity hymnal (# 139)? May this be our experience of His Word as we turn back to study the work of Old Testament prophets, especially Elijah and Elisha.

1 Your Word is like a garden, Lord,
with flowers bright and fair;
and everyone who seeks may pluck
a lovely cluster there.
Your Word is like a deep, deep mine;
and jewels rich and rare
are hidden in its mighty depths
for every searcher there.

2 Your Word is like a starry host;
a thousand rays of light
are seen to guide the traveler,
and make his pathway bright.
Your Word is like an armory,
where soldiers may repair,
and find, for life's long battle day,
all needful weapons there.

3 O may I love your precious Word,
may I explore the mine,
may I its fragrant flowers glean,
may light upon me shine.
O may I find my armor there,
your Word my trusty sword;
I'll learn to fight with every foe
the battle of the Lord.

Monday: Read 1 Kings 17:1-6 & Deuteronomy 28:15-24

Ravens of Mercy

Elijah was powerfully used by God on the stage of Israelite history. He is God's prophet to do battle against the idol of Baal, the "god" of the storm whom so many pagan nations worshipped. We grasp something of the importance of this battle between the LORD and Baal from this entry in *Tabletalk* magazine:

Just when it appeared that Baal had won over the people of Israel, Yahweh sent His prophet to prove who was the true God. We meet Elijah for the first time in 1 Kings 17:1. Although we know almost nothing about his background, his name, which means "my God is Yah[weh]," tells us almost everything we need to understand about his mission. Elijah would demonstrate the glory of Yahweh over Baal and become the paradigm for the Hebrew prophets after him.

Many ancient Near Eastern cultures worshiped Baal, who was associated with fertility since he was the god of the storm and the rain. For God to announce drought to a group of Baal worshipers, as He did when Elijah confronted Ahab, revealed who truly had the power. Israelites who worshiped Baal in order to get rain to make their crops succeed were foolish indeed, for not even this god of the storm could bring water to the earth once Yahweh decided to close the heavens (17:1-7). Furthermore, drought evidenced God's displeasure with the northern kingdom, for drought was one of the curses that attended the breaking of the Mosaic covenant Dt 28:23

Meditate and Pray: In mathematical numbers, if Baal had his prophets, (1 Kings 18:22), God had reserved for Himself 7,000 who had not bowed their knees to this false god (1 Kings 19:18). Ask God to open our eyes to notice and provide aid to those who are suffering for defying “baal” today.

Tues/Weds: read 1 Kings 17:7-16; 18:1-6 and 2 Kings 4:1-7

A Table of Provision

We see from 1 & 2 Kings how fierce the battle was between the true prophets of Yahweh (translated as LORD in our Bibles) and the false prophets of Baal. But how was daily life for the average Israelite believer generally and the schools of Elijah’s and Elisha’s disciples in particular? The answer is seen from the life of Obadiah, a believer who served in the courts of evil king Ahab in 1 Kings 18:2-6. In secret, Obadiah kept one hundred faithful prophets of God alive in caves, protecting them from the murderous idolatry of King Ahab and his Phoenician Queen Jezebel.

So the life of faith was full of trials back then as it is today. The common lot of believers: suffering but comforted by God; cast down, but still supported by their LORD; penniless, yet in the end richly provided for, is the link in the stories of those to whom Elijah and Elisha minister.

Remember the widow of Zarephath, to whom Elijah is sent in 1 Kings 17. She had only enough firewood, oil and flour to cook one last meal before she and her son would perish. That is her hopeless situation. Yet, by the power of God, that small amount is miraculously enough for the widow to provide for herself, her son (and even for Elijah) as long as the famine lasts.

Meditate and Pray: Do you believe in God’s ability to “provide a table for you in the presence of your enemies?” Do you believe He can rescue your life from the jaws of despair when you run out of all options for self-preservation? This is how the LORD our God works – He delights to lay bare His saving arm when all other help vanishes! He often waits until the 11th hour and then snatches victory from the jaws of defeat. As the hymn writer says, “...*this is My Father’s world, and though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet!*” Sing the lines of this great hymn # 111 whenever you are tempted to give up because of the misery and difficulty of your situation:

1 This is my Father's world,
and to my list'ning ears,
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
his hand the wonders wrought.

2 This is my Father's world,
the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lily white,
declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
he shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass I hear him pass,
he speaks to me everywhere.

3 This is my Father's world,
O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:

the battle is not done;
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
and earth and heav'n be one.

Thurs/Fri: Read 1 Kings 19:10-18 & Isaiah 63:7-14**The Remnant Preserved**

Despite Elijah's despair that he was the "only believer left," God assured him that there were thousands of a remnant in Israel that were faithful to the Lord (1 Kings 19:18). *One source* of the "seven thousand" believers in Israel who did not bow the knee to Baal was that Elijah, like Samuel before him, had established seats of education in God's Word that came to be known as "schools of the prophets." (See 2 Kings 2:3 and 4:1 referring to the "sons of the prophets.") These schools were scattered throughout the ten tribes.

So God had His remnant of faithful ones even in the dark days of king Ahab. Yes, to be sure – they suffered greatly. The sinful and cruel idolatry of the prophets of Baal and Asherah, who "ate at Jezebel's table" (1 Kings 18:19) and were her tools in the slaughter of so many prophets of the LORD (1 Kings 18:4,13), made it costly for those "seven thousand" who walked in the righteous ways of the true God of Israel.

Nevertheless, by His Spirit God consistently comforted His own, as we see from Isaiah 63:7-14. He led them in the wilderness by His Spirit, though they grieved Him many times. In vs 14 He mentions that He led them "like livestock down into the valley" – carefully and gradually he led them to a place of rest. He continued to lead His remnant in the days of Elijah and Elisha by that same Spirit.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the leading of the Holy Spirit in your daily life. Just as God's Spirit led God's own in days of old, so He leads today. Use red Trinity hymnal # 335:

1 Gracious Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would gracious be;
and with words that help and heal
would thy life in mine reveal;
and with actions bold and meek
would for Christ my Savior speak.

2 Truthful Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would truthful be;
and with wisdom kind and clear
let Thy life in mine appear;
and with actions brotherly
speak my Lord's sincerity.

3 Mighty Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would mighty be;
mighty so as to prevail,
where unaided man must fail;
ever by a mighty hope,
pressing on and bearing up.

4 Holy Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would holy be;
separate from sin, I would
choose and cherish all things good,
and whatever I can be
give to him who gave me thee!

Sat/Sun: read 2 Kings 2:1-15**Double Portions**

To give ourselves hope as we face the same kind of weakness and oppression that God's people in Old Testament days of persecution faced, we have turned to that great and comforting doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in days of old.

With that same hope for the comfort and strength of the Holy Spirit to be poured out on his labors, the prophet Elisha asked for a double portion of the Spirit that rested on Elijah to be bestowed on him.

We see the answer of Elisha's prayer for a "double portion" of the Spirit when other prophets honor Elisha as Elijah's replacement (v15). They recognize that the Spirit is resting on Elisha as He did on Elijah. Interestingly, the word translated "portion" in 2 Kings 2:9 comes from the word for one's mouth. It seems to mean that portion which can fit in one's mouth (or) that portion of the Spirit, as He is the "breath" of God.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks to God that His Spirit has always been in the business of granting spiritual life to every single one of God's elect in Scripture. The work of regeneration, whether in the Old or New Testaments, has always been in the hands of the Holy Spirit. He is the great promise of God's Covenant of Grace. Sing about how God's grace is poured on each subsequent generation of His servants, and upon us as His people, using this hymn by John Newton, that references 2 Kings 2:9 in its last verse:

1. In vain my fancy strives to paint
The moment after death;
The glories that surround the saints,
When yielding up their breath.
2. One gentle sigh their fetters breaks,
We scarce can say, They're gone!
Before the willing spirit takes
Her mansion near the throne.
3. Faith strives, but all its efforts fail,
To trace her in her flight;
No eye can pierce within the veil
Which hides that world of light.
4. Thus much (and this is all) we know,
They are completely blest;
Have done with sin, and care, and woe,
And with their Savior rest.
5. Their faith and patience, love and zeal,
Should make their memory dear;
And, Lord, do Thou the prayers fulfill,
They offered for us here.
6. While they have gained, we losers are,
We miss them day by day;
But Thou canst every breach repair,
And wipe our tears away.
7. We pray, as in Elisha's case,
When great Elijah went,
May double portions of Thy grace,
To us who stay, be sent.