

*'They shall  
mount up...*

# ON EAGLES' WINGS

*... with wings  
as eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



## AERY NUGGETS

Cherith 1 Kings 17:1-9

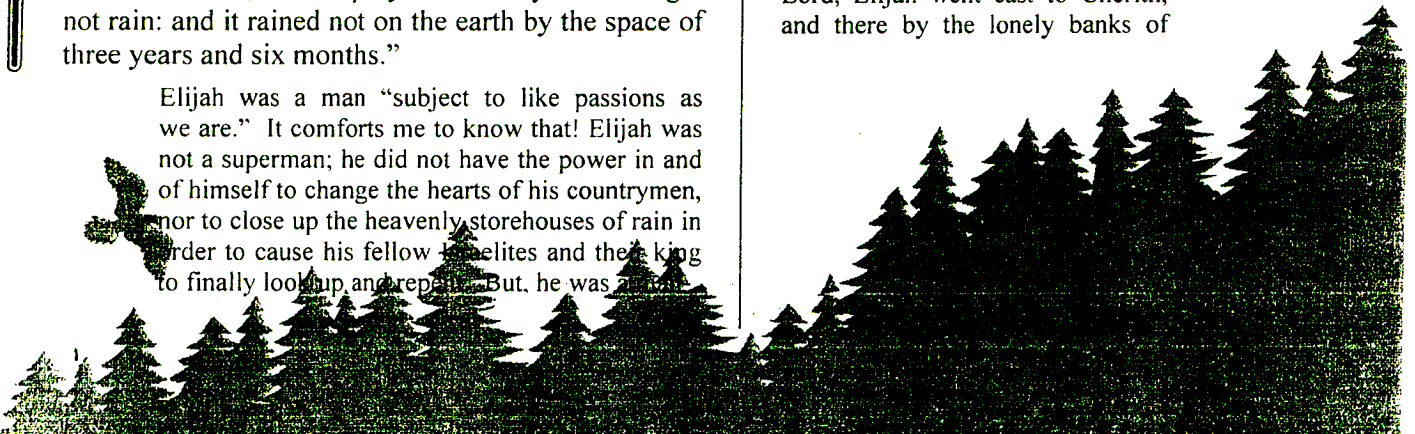
Steven J. Faulkner

Elijah the Tishbite was an obedient servant of God in a land where God had been neglected and ignored for many years. We do not hear about him prior to chapter 17 of 1 Kings, but we certainly do read about the deplorable state of affairs in the nation of Israel in those days. Ahab was arguably the worst of a long line of kings in Israel; these kings had entirely forgotten about God, and collectively, they had led their nation into a state of spiritual depravity. A good friend once described for me the effects of sin in the following simile: sin is like a pebble dropping into a pond; the ripples go out in all directions, and many in distant places are affected. So it was with the sins of the kings of Israel in those days; the nation had by and large followed the example of their kings, and there were precious few in the land who yet stood for God. But, Elijah was God's man in this sad scene, and we see in James 5:17 that he prayed for God's intervention to turn the hearts of the people back to God: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months."

Elijah was a man "subject to like passions as we are." It comforts me to know that! Elijah was not a superman; he did not have the power in and of himself to change the hearts of his countrymen, nor to close up the heavenly storehouses of rain in order to cause his fellow Israelites and their king to finally look up and repent. But, he was

who trusted in the God for whom nothing is impossible. We read that he prayed earnestly for God's intervening hand, and surely he believed that his petition was granted. Then, this man of faith went before Ahab to deliver his hard message about the coming drought. We read in verse 1, "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, 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."

Elijah had obediently delivered God's message to a godless king, and this certainly did not endear him to Ahab; speaking the truth about sin and the need for repentance in this world often elicits a very negative response. But, Elijah was faithful in delivering this message despite the possibility of having to endure the wrath of the king. He was also willing to trust in God for what would come next: "And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there," (verses 2-4. I don't know what Elijah expected after delivering his hard message to Ahab, but I doubt he could have guessed that God would send him out into a wilderness place to be fed by ravens. Still, in accordance with the word of the Lord, Elijah went east to Cherith, and there by the lonely banks of



this wandering stream, he was protected and cared for by God. We read in verses 5-7, "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. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land."

Can you imagine this scene? I had a book of Sunday School stories when I was a child, and this story was one I vividly remember. The picture showed Elijah sitting on the bank of a stream with his hands stretched towards the heavens, and he was looking at a long line of ravens trailing back toward the cloudless horizon; they were flying towards him, and each carried a piece of food in its beak to deliver to the outstretched hand of the man of God. For me, this picture strikingly portrays the place of dependence where I believe God would have His servants to be. God was protecting Elijah from the wrath of Ahab by removing him from the king's presence during the time that the drought would have its effect on the land. Yet, the simple truth of it is that Elijah too would be touched by the very drought he had prayed for, and God would use this whole experience to accomplish another purpose.

Did you ever wonder how Elijah became such a man of faith? We are not told in this portion, but I have to believe that many hours in Elijah's life were spent learning the lessons of faith through the trials that God allowed in his life. Here, this faithful man of God would be obliged to spend lonely hours in a desolate place, trusting only in the sustaining hand of God. I truly believe that faith and dependence are some of the most important things that the child of God must learn in this world, and we learn best through the trials that attend our way.

Elijah was a faithful man of prayer, yet consider his lonely vigil in the eastern wilderness. He sat alone by his brook, his only companionship being the ravens which God had commanded to feed him. What a humbling situation! I do not know what Elijah's customary diet had been previously, nor whether he found his new rations to be especially palatable. But, God faithfully cared for His servant in this desolate place. Whatever his previous occupation had been, Elijah was no longer able to provide for himself, and he now sat in loneliness, waiting prayerfully for each and every bite of food he was to receive for that particular day, not knowing what the plan would be for the next day—only that God would provide. Eventually, due to the drought in the land, even the stream itself, which provided life sustaining water, dried up; yet this man of God must still wait. God had a plan for His servant—He always does. But doesn't it seem that God's plan is often not revealed until the eleventh hour? In this case, the stream had to first dry up leaving Elijah with no clear direction, then came the Word of the Lord showing the path of blessing for this servant: "And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee," (verses 8,9).

My dear friend, perhaps you have sat by Cherith—perhaps you are sitting there just now. It may be that you have been faithful in prayer and have done your best to follow the Lord, yet you are now experiencing times that try the soul. Perhaps those who once stood with you now despise you, or your health has failed, or the economy or other circumstances have claimed your job. Perhaps natural calamities have drasti-

cally affected your life and the lives of those around you, and the way for tomorrow seems uncertain and even forbidding. Such times are difficult, but they are not unexpected for the child of God in this fallen world. Our path through this life is a path that surely leads to glory; yet, God brings His children through many trials along this wilderness way. Recall the Apostle Paul's encouragement to the saints who were suffering persecution for their faith at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Acts 14:22, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Yet, come what may in this world, we have the assurance of the presence of our Lord in every circumstance, "...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," (Hebrews 13:5).

In this account of Elijah which we have read, it occurs to me that Elijah himself had to experience loneliness and isolation in a desolate place, and also the effects of the drought, even though he himself had not forgotten God. Yet, God certainly used the experience to strengthen Elijah's faith, and also to teach his servant a further lesson in dependence. God often uses the trials that are allowed into the lives of His saints to teach and perfect them. I think of the Apostle Paul who presented the Gospel so faithfully all over the Roman world, and who by faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit healed many with infirmities among those he encountered. Yet, God allowed an affliction to enter the life of this faithful witness to the Gentiles which even repeated prayer would not remove as we read in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10,

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." We are not told exactly what the thorn was that Paul was obliged to experience, and I think I'm glad that this is the case. Perhaps the Holy Spirit purposely left that part untold so that we would not get the idea that God's gracious words were intended for only one situation; that you or I might be able to find comfort in seeing God's hand in our own particular circumstance just now.

My dear Christian friend, as you sit on that lonely bank waiting moment by moment for the sustaining Grace of God, may you hear His loving voice calling to you, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

"Great is Thy faithfulness! great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!"

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