

1 Kings 17:1 to 24 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

For the next 5 weeks we are going to study that great prophet Elijah the Tishbite from the town of Tishbe in Gilead, as recorded in 1 Kings. Gilead is about 20 miles east of the river Jordan, in the country we now know as Jordan.

Elijah enters our story very abruptly, there is no mention of him until we hear of him in verse 1 of our reading, telling Ahab that Yahweh, is the God of Israel not Baal.

Now Ahab entered the story in the previous chapter. He was the son of Omri who reigned for 34 years, and who did evil in the sight of the Lord, and was a very bad influence on his son.

The previous chapter also tells us that Ahab married Jezebel a pagan worshipper of the god Baal, and that Ahab adopted his wife's religion, built altars to Baal and worshipped him, and not too surprising it provoked God's anger.

Because Ahab abandoned Yahweh, king Ahab was the worse king of Israel that Israel had known so far, worse even than Omri his dad.

Chapter 16 verse 30 confirms as much, verse 30 reads, “Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him.”

And of course Ahab's wife Jezebel was so wanton that she has now entered the Oxford English dictionary as a shameless and immoral woman, such was her reputation.

So when Elijah stood before Ahab and declared, “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.”

In saying those words Elijah was declaring war against Baal, the pagan God of rain and fertility, and I'm sure Ahab and Jezebel would have also taken it personally, because Baal was their God.

This clearly was a very brave step to take, to tell Ahab and Jezebel that it was Yahweh who could control the rain, not their pagan god Baal, and that Yahweh is going to do something that Baal could never do; he's going to cause a drought which only Yahweh, the true God of Israel, can put an end too.

Indeed, through Elijah, this was only the start of the divine chastisement that God continually inflicted on Ahab and Jezebel, as representatives of Baal throughout his reign.

It was the message and also the way that Elijah spoke to king Ahab that king Ahab must have recognised Elijah as a man who acts and speaks with divine authority from God.

Which of course is how we recognise him as a prophet as well, indeed the name Elijah means, 'my God is Yahweh.' Which reflects his character as a man totally dedicated to God.

But God was with him, protecting him, when Elijah spoke to

Ahab, and God managed to get Elijah safely away from him.

Then God told Elijah where to hide, out of the way of Ahab and Jezebel, which was by the Wadi Cherith, which was east of the Jordan very near to Tishbe in Gilead, where Elijah was born and grew up, so he must have known the area quite well.

Wadi is the Arabic name for a water course or river, which would usually be dried up most of the year along with the valley it ran through, a very dry arid landscape, the Wadi Cherith ran into the river Jordan.

Now of course since Elijah's declaration to Ahab about the drought, the Wadi would be dried up all the sooner, until God put a stop to the drought, by allowing it to rain.

However when he arrived at the Wadi there was still water in it, and we are told that he drank from it, and that God fed him by commanding the ravens to bring him bread and meat to live on, but of course it wasn't long before the river was a victim of God's own declaration of no rain.

And in verse 8 God tells Elijah to go to Zerephath, a town on the Mediterranean, a distance of about 120 miles NW from the Wadi Cherith, and which belonged to Sidon and to live there; and he added that he had commanded a widow there to feed him..

Incidentally Zerephath is where Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, would have originated from, being the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon.

This indeed may have been a very clever move that God made

in sending Elijah to Sidon, because that may well have been the last place Ahab and Jezebel would have looked for him, being right on her parents doorstep as it were.

Also the Wadi Cherith could only have ever been a temporary hiding place, being so near to his home, possibly an obvious place, for Ahab eventually to go and look for him.

On his way to Zerephath, Elijah must have been concerned to know how he was going to live because the drought clearly covered that area as well.

But being near the sea he may have thought that he would be living on fish for sometime, but his experience of God was such that he had full confidence and trust in God to provide what was required.

After all God had provided for Elijah's food to be air lifted to him at the Wadi Cherith, and if God can do that, then Elijah had no need to worry about where his next meal was coming from.

But we must not be too casual about Elijah's faith in God, it took great courage and faith to speak to Ahab as he did when he threatened Ahab's kingdom with a drought, which of course would certainly cause a severe famine.

Nor must we gloss over Elijah's readiness to obey God when it came to journeying about 120 miles for food when he must have known that the food shortage could be just as bad there, and that he was going into Jezebel country.

However when he reached the gates of the town of Zerephath

he met a widow woman collecting sticks. Now that was no accident that he met the widow at the gate to the town, because we are told in verse 9 that God had already commanded her to feed Elijah.

And Elijah called to her and said, 'bring me a little water in a vessel so that I may drink', and it is clear that she recognised him from God's description, because she immediately obeyed.

As she was going to bring it, he called to her again and said, 'bring me a morsel of bread.'

Now here's two commands to a woman Elijah had never met before, two commands that she thinks nothing of carrying out, except for the fact she hasn't got any bread, and hardly enough flour to make enough bread for herself and her son.

She then addresses him by saying, 'As the Lord your God lives.' Now from that it is clear that she does recognise Elijah as the person that God spoke to her about, when God told her to feed Elijah when he comes.

What ever it was about Elijah he was instantly recognised as a man of God and as a man with divine authority, who she would have obeyed had she had the means to do it.

She then explains that she has nothing baked, and that she only has a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And she was reluctant to give him that because then she would have none left, and starvation would be that much closer to herself and her son.

But Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as I've said;

but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, afterwards make some for your son and yourself.

He then said a fantastic thing to her; he told her that the flour Jar would never empty and the oil jug never run dry until God sends more rain.

We now have to consider the widow's faith; so far she had only known Elijah for a few minutes and already he had persuaded her to part with some very precious food by telling her, that against all reason and logic, her source of food supply will never cease.

For me there is very little difference between Elijah's faith and the unknown widow's faith in that they both have unswerving faith in God. I have no doubt that both were chosen by God for their faith.

The world has always been full of unknown people of extraordinary faith in God who may never be recognised outside their own communities but their influence in spreading the Good News of God is nevertheless significant.

At verse 17 we read that the widows son has been taken ill from which he died, and she goes to Elijah and and accuses him of allowing the death of her son by virtue of not curing his illness, which clearly she believed he could have done, if he wanted too.

In response to that accusation, Elijah said, "Give me your son."

He took him from her and carried him upstairs and put him on his own bed and prayed for him and God answered his prayer by restoring the boy back to life.

Then Elijah gave the boy back to his mother and she declared that she now knew that Elijah was a man of God and that he only ever spoke the truth.

This account of Elijah and the widow is also a clear affirmation that God rewards faith and trust in him.

As we sit et us pray

Almighty God, who in your wisdom have so ordered our earthly life that we must walk by faith and not by sight; grant us such faith in you that among all things that pass our understanding, we may believe in your fatherly care, and ever be strengthened by the assurance that you are always walking by our side; we ask this through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.