

1 KINGS 19:1-6

NIV: Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all of the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

S C R I P T U R A L
B A C K G R O U N D

We began our Lenten journey with Jesus making his way into the wilderness. "Wilderness" often reminds us of desolation and danger - and for many moments in the Bible, the wilderness is just that. The Israelites, for example, faced many dangers in their 40 years traveling through the wilderness to Canaan - including hunger, thirst, hostile enemies, and venomous serpents.

Let us consider, though, that in the Bible wilderness is often a place of grace, just as it is a place of danger. Repeatedly God's providence is experienced in the wilderness. The Israelites discovered that God inhabits the wilderness and watches over all who take refuge there.

As Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness, God provided manna (miraculous bread) and water that flowed from desert stones. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, yet cared for by God's angels. In the Book of Revelation, the wilderness is a symbol of safety and protection during a season of persecution.

One of the best stories of God's provision in the wilderness is the story of Elijah - one of God's greatest prophets. God called Elijah during a time of wickedness and danger. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel encouraged the nation to turn away from the God who saved them from slavery in the land of Egypt. They set up altars to other gods and led people to worship Canaanite idols.



God raised up Elijah to speak truth and to call the nation to repentance. God gave Elijah the power to work signs and wonders. Elijah called down fire from heaven, fed a widow with miraculous flour, and even raised a child from the dead.

All of these signs and wonders caused Ahab and Jezebel to become angry, stubborn, and more determined to defeat Elijah. They put a price on Elijah's head and sent many men to hunt him down. Disillusioned and exhausted, Elijah escaped to the wilderness.

1 Kings 19 shows Elijah in his lowest moment. Elijah decides he can't go on - ready to be done with life. He sits beneath a tree and prays, "I can't go any further. Lord, take my life away, for I have failed in my mission." He closes his eyes and waits to die.

God, whose presence fills the wilderness, has other plans. Just as angels appear to Jesus, one appears to Elijah, tapping him on the shoulder, saying "dear friend, please have some food." Elijah awoke to fresh bread and water. Elijah ate, drank, and slept.

Elijah continued his ministry and met another young prophet, Elisha, along the way. Together they led the work of turning the nation back to God.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS TO MINISTRY

What wisdom can we take from this story? We find that God's presence fills the wilderness and God meets us and cares for us in our lowest moments. We also discover that even the greatest prophets need a little water to drink, a little food to

eat, and some quality sleep. If anyone has been around an over-tired toddler, we know how the most basic essentials improve overall quality of life.

We, at CFWF, help communities find access to clean, dependable water because sometimes a lack of water is the only thing keeping communities from tapping into their God-given gifts and abilities. Elijah was filled with the Holy Spirit, but if not for the care he received in the wilderness, his ministry would've fizzled. After all, he was only human.

Students can't learn if they don't have a safe space to sleep at night, food in their bellies, and their thirst satiated with clean water. When we help a community secure access to water, we build a foundation for all the signs and wonders that follow.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

As we look back to the example of God's grace in the wilderness, let's be reminded of God's provision and ask ourselves how we may provide support for others who are walking through their own "wilderness".

- Can you remember a time when you felt like you were in the wilderness? How did God provide for you while walking through this season?
- When walking through times of fear or hardship, do you take the time to actively seek God?
- How could you help someone else who may be walking their own "wilderness" or season of personal hardship?