

10. Guided by the Lord

February 28, 2008

I am rather an organized person. On my day off which is Tuesday, I do all my errand. I go into Tucson, meet people, a couple of times of a month I do a ride-along with the Sheriff's Department deputies, participating in the Pima Regional SWAT team training, picking up my laundries, etc. You have to see my Palm on Tuesday, it is filled with what needs to be done each hour. I'd like to know and plan where I should go, when I should go and what I should do.

But our Lord doesn't work with me with my schedule, nor does He care about my plan. He is not the least bit concerned about my plan for the future. Because He has something else way better to bring glory to Himself, not some self-satisfying silly plan of mine.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Out of the blue, we find ourselves reading stories about a prophet name Elijah which means, "The Lord (Jehovah) is my God." I say Elijah is a right name for this man of God. God used him to warn the nation and the wicked king Jezebel and her husband Ahab, I meant, king Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

To be used by God mightily, Elijah had to go through three years of wilderness training for himself like Apostle Paul did in an Arabian desert before his three missionary journeys. He was guided by the Lord one step at a time. Just like that the Lord wants to guide us and lead us one step at a time so that we can depend on Him and learn to trust Him.

We will pick up where we left off from chapter 16:29.

A. THE MOST WICKED KING IN ISRAEL

1 Kings 16:29-34 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. 30 Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. 31 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. 32 Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. 34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the Lord, which He had spoken through Joshua the son of Nun.

King Ahab was known as the most wicked king, more wicked than Jeroboam. In addition to his wickedness, he was married to this wicked woman Hillary Clinton, I meant, Jezebel who was a foreigner and a Baal idol worshiper. She brought a full blown idol worship to the nation which already was going down in spiral. She was famous for her idolatry, and cruelty, and sorcery and filthiness.

I have not seen any mom and dad name their daughter Jezebel. That is a good thing. Jezebel was not the one whom anyone wants to model.

I asked you to underline v34. It seems that Ahab wanted to challenge the prophecy of Joshua after the destruction of the city Jericho.

Joshua 6:26 Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, "Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates."

The Lord spoke this through His faithful servant Joshua. Ahab used Hiel of Bethel to rebuilt the city Jericho. We don't know if it was done in child sacrifice like many occult practices or something else, but his two sons were killed at the construction site as the Lord prophesied. Don't mess with God. It is not good for your health.

B. A WARNING OF A THREE YEAR DRAUGHT

1 Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

The Jewish people depended on the seasonal rains for the success of their crops. If the Lord didn't send the early rain in October and November and the latter rain in March and April, there would soon be a famine in the land. But the blessing of the semiannual rains depended on the people obeying the covenant of the Lord according to Deut. 11. God warned them, but they didn't listen. So the Lord was holding back the rain for three long years.

This was a dramatic power demonstration against the pagan god Baal these Israelites were worshiping. Baal was considered as the god of the weather. So God was telling them, "If your Baal can compete with Me, I dare him to give his best shot while I am holding rain back for three years from you." This is a preview of what was going to happen in chapter 18.

C. DEPENDING ON GOD AND HIS WINGED MESSENGERS

1 Kings 17:2-7 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 3 "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 4 And it will be that 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, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 6 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 it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

After Elijah had delivered his powerful message to Ahab and Jezebel, the Lord told Elijah to high tail out into obscurity – disappear for a while – and God would provide foods for him there. Besides, Ahab wanted to kill the messenger because he didn't like the message to him from God anyway.

The escape to the Brook Cherith was for more than protection. It was also to train Elijah in dependence upon the Lord. In a season of drought, he had to trust that God could keep this brook flowing. He also had to accept food from the ravens, an unclean animal.

On Sunday mornings, when I get to the school, I see some big ravens. Those suckers are big. I don't think they like to eat clean foods, rather they seem to like to do dumpster diving. They eat roadkills, they eat something we wouldn't. But by the command of God, they obediently brought bread and meat to Elijah day after day. Some commentators said that he stayed in this location for a year.

The Lord provides us what we need in spite of an impossible situation according to His promise. Let's not forget it.

Do the sudden changes in Elijah's life sound a little familiar? Maybe things were going reasonably well in your own life, and God redirected you. It didn't necessarily make sense at the moment. The next thing we know is that the brook dried up.

Maybe that's happened to you too. Things were humming along, then one day your spouse said, "I'm leaving. I don't want to be married to you." He's gone. Your brook dried up. Maybe you got a call from the place you've worked for twenty years: "Sorry. We have to downsize." Your brook just dried up. Your world ended. Or so it seemed.

Actually, it might be a whole new beginning. When God closes one door, He opens another. Elijah was about to discover this. In fact, God was preparing him.

God was getting him ready, step by step, challenge by challenge. Big things were coming. The next phase was about to start. It's the same with you. If you've been told to head for the hills and be fed by birds, so to speak, if your brook has dried up, if a door has closed in your life, don't think God is done with you. You need to just trust Him. He may be getting you ready for phase two. He may be whipping you into shape for something beyond your wildest dreams.

D. ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW

1 Kings 17:8-16 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." 11 And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 So she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, 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 make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.'" 15 So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.

The Lord commanded Elijah to travel northeast about a hundred miles to the Phoenician city of Zarephath. This was the general region that the wicked queen Jezebel was from. In addition to that, he was instructed to live with a widow whom God had selected to care for him, and widows were usually among the neediest people in the land.

When Jesus was rejected by His own people from Nazareth, He used this example of Elijah's coming to the widow of Zarephath as an illustration of God's right to choose a people to Himself.

Luke 4:24-26 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days

of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26 but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

Why did God change Elijah's training location from the Brook Cherith to Zarephath? Because of our proneness to look at the gift and forget the gift Giver, the Lord frequently changes His methods of supply to keep our eyes fixed on Him, not the gifts we receive from Him.

This poor widow was about to prepare their last meal and expected to starve to death. What Elijah asked her to do was more than absurd from an unspiritual viewpoint. He had an audacity to ask her to give him their last meal with the promise from the God of Israel whom she didn't serve. It sounded like the worst kind of self-centered TV evangelist's fund raising. But Elijah had an assurance from God that she would provide foods for him and she would be provided, too.

God indeed chose this woman for three reasons: To keep her family alive, to show her His kindness and to save her from idol worship.

The Lord led Elijah one step at a time. He did not tell him to go to Cherith until he first delivered the message to Ahab. He did not tell him to go to Zarephath until the brook dried up at Cherith. God led Elijah by faith, one step at a time, and Elijah followed in faith.

Now, I have a \$50,000 question for you. If you are a pastor or Christian counselor. A single man of God comes to you and tells you that he found an apartment in the second floor of this widow's home who has a son. He asks you if that is OK with you for him to move in. If you are like me, you'd slap the back of his head and tell him, "Get with it, boy. You need to be above reproach. It will bring an appearance of evil." Then, that man might say, "Elijah moved into the widow's home, why can't I?" How would you respond?

I believe that this man of God should not move in there. First of all, he ain't Elijah and second, God wouldn't tell him to move in.

E. REVIVING A DEAD SON

1 Kings 17:17-24 Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" 19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. 20 Then he cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?" 21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him." 22 Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!" 24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth."

This is the first recorded instance in Scripture of the resuscitation of a dead person. He was completely dead and his soul left his body. Only God can send one's spirit back to the earthly owner.

The death of the son was a double blow to the widow. Not only did she suffer as any mother who loses a child, but she also suffered as one who lost her only earthly hope for the future.

Since it was the Lord who brought Elijah to this home, he brought the son of the widow to the Lord for an answer and resuscitation of the boy.

Some tried to explain away the method of Elijah as a Hebrew style CPR. No one knows.

During these three years as an exile and a hunted man, Elijah has learned a great deal about the Lord, about himself and about the needs of people. He has learned to live a day at a time, trusting God for his daily bread. But the Lord is more concerned about the worker than the work, and He has been preparing Elijah for the greatest challenge of faith in his entire ministry.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) The Lord provides for us what we need in spite of an impossible situation according to His promise.

2) When God closes one door, He opens another. We need to trust His sovereign will for us and obey His guidance.