

Survey of the Bible part 15

Last week we ended with a King coming to power in Israel who was not very pleasing to God and as such God was going to deal with him.

1 Kings 16:30-34 ³⁰ Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him. ³¹ It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. ³² So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. ³³ Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him. ³⁴ In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundations with the *loss of* Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the *loss of* his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

And so, we come to chapter 17.

1 Kings 17:1 ^{NAU} Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

We don't know that much about Elijah's past. He suddenly appears on the scene and is used by God as His prophet to bring a message to King Ahab.

And in essence what is that message and why would God bring this message to Ahab?

Does bringing a famine, that is caused by a drought to the land, only affect Ahab?

No it affects all of Israel.

Does this mean that all of Israel had sinned against the Lord?

No. So, what we see here is that in God judging all of Israel and in particular King Ahab, the unrighteous along with the righteous will be affected.

Sometimes we get the idea that simply being a believer exempts us from the affects of sin, particularly the sin of others. We look at this country for example and assume that because this was a country based on the principles of the word of God that we are somehow a “Christian” nation.

To the degree that our founding fathers were by and large people who honored the “Christian faith” we can say that we are a nation built, not on a pagan world view, (ie. Islam, or Buddhism, or any other type of non-biblical faith.)

But, to say that all of our founding fathers were true believers in Christ is simply not the case. Some were Christians, some were deists, others were nominal Christians, while others were ambivalent. In other words, some of them were pragmatists and found that biblical principles would ensure more freedom than other types of approaches to governing the people.

But when leaders of a nation, particularly leaders of nations where the people don’t have much or any say in the way they are led, those leaders are much more responsible to God for the way they lead.

We know that there is not a nation on earth where God has not placed the responsibility of the leaders squarely on their shoulders to lead the people in a godly way, whether they do so or not.

This was clearly the case when Jesus was confronted by Pilate on the day that He was to be crucified.

John 19:6-11 ⁶ So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God." ⁸ Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was *even* more afraid; ⁹ and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin."

Where does authority to govern people ultimately come from?

The people in Jerusalem during the time of Christ had no real say in the way they were to be governed. And yet, as far as God is concerned, whoever is in control has been given authority, not merely by other men, but by the Creator Himself.

With this being true even pagans are obliged to obey God as it comes to ruling the people placed in their care, and Pilate was no exception.

The problem is even more pronounced when people do have a say in the way their governing officials rule over them. And so, when the people place a ruler over them the sin of the rulers will often affect the lives of all.

If you don't think this is the case just look at this country and watch where the rulers are trying to lead us: homosexual marriage as opposed to God's clear will of one man and one woman, legalized stealing in the form of socialism, as opposed to God's law of equal weights and balances and personal responsibility, the murder of the unborn as opposed to God's clear teaching that human life begins at conception.

Do you think God will simply wink at this type of sin and that not only the leaders, but also the people will not be affected by God's judgment on such behavior?

And yet we have a dilemma as Christians. We may be God-fearing and God lovers, but does this mean we will escape the judgments God will bring on this nation and is currently bringing on this nation?

And so, even though Barak Obama is the one who is trying to steal from you, (even though you may or may not have voted for him), you are going to suffer the consequences of such leadership in a variety of ways.

And so, even though someone is not political, everyone in this country is affected in a political way. But more importantly, they are affected in a spiritual way because God is the One who ultimately will either bless or judge such leadership. We can't escape it.

You can go to Bolivia, or New Zealand, or anywhere else in the world, but you will be affected by the sins of the leaders in those countries as well. Our solutions are not found in our political leaders, they are found in following Christ.

This means that even though we may be affected by the sins of the leaders of our country we still have the responsibility to honor God in the country in which we live even if God's judgment on this country directly affects us.

This goes back to trusting that God will watch over His people and provide for them. This is precisely what Jesus told the Jews.

Luke 12:6-7 ⁶ "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? *Yet* not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

And this is precisely what we're going to see with the people of Israel as God judges Ahab and the people, but continues to provide for the needs of His people as we'll see with Elijah.

So, Elijah seems to appear out of nowhere and brings a message of judgment to Ahab, and then immediately God whisks him away.

1 Kings 17:2-7 ² The word of the LORD came to him, saying, ³ "Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁴ "It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there." ⁵ So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook. ⁷ It happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

This paragraph is amazing on so many different levels. We see the natural and the supernatural working together in a real world with real problems. But the common denominator is that God is directing both.

The first thing we notice here is that God gives a command to Elijah to do something, what is that?

To hide himself.

If God is Elijah's protector why does he have to hide himself east of the Jordan River?

Because this would be the means that God provided for Elijah. He could just as easily have commanded a company of angels to protect him right outside the palace of Ahab, but He chooses to do it this way.

It's kind of like the way we sometimes view God's ways in dealing with us. You have a person who is stuck on top of his house because the flood waters have come up so high that he has nowhere else to retreat. He prays for deliverance from God.

Shortly after his prayer a man in a boat comes up to him and asks if he wants a ride to dry land. The man replies he's waiting on God to deliver him. Shortly after that a helicopter hovers over his head and drops a line to him, but he responds that he doesn't want to climb up because he's waiting on God to deliver him.

The waters continue to rise and he drowns at which point the man stands before God and asks Him why He didn't deliver him from the flood to which God responds I sent you a boat and a helicopter, what were you waiting on?

God can deliver miraculously and He can deliver through natural means, but in the final analysis it is God in whom we trust for all things. And simply because we don't see God responding in the way we expect doesn't mean that God isn't actively working in our lives to our good and His glory.

So, now Elijah is by the brook Cherith. And what is he doing by the brook Cherith?

Nothing. He is simply waiting on God.

But it's what he is not doing that is amazing. What is he not doing according to the text?

1 Kings 17:5-6 ⁵ So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook.

It appears that he doesn't have to hunt or gather to sustain his life. If you've ever watched any of these Survival programs, they give specific information as to what you need to do to survive in a harsh environment. Often it's first building a shelter, then finding water and then devising ways to get food.

Elijah is east of the Jordan by a brook, so his immediate need for water has been met naturally by God.

Does this mean there was no supernatural involvement by God to meet this need for Elijah?

Of course there was. It was God who told Elijah specifically where to go. Elijah simply responds by faith and heads for the brook by Cherith east of the Jordan.

But there is a way in which God responds to Elijah's other needs for food.

How does God do that?

By having ravens provide meat and food for Elijah twice daily.

1 Kings 17:4 ⁴ "It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there."

1 Kings 17:6 ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook.

Does anyone see the irony in this? Ravens are scavengers and they're not likely to share anything with anybody. If they find food they're going to eat it.

So, why wouldn't they eat this food instead of bringing it to Elijah?

1 Kings 17:4 I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there."

Is there anyone or anything that God couldn't use of His own creation that couldn't serve Him as He desires?

Luke 3:8 ⁸ "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

Luke 19:37-40 ³⁷ As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God ¹joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles

which they had seen, ³⁸ shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." ⁴⁰ But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

But back to the issue of the Ravens providing for Elijah, this does raise an interesting question. **Where did they get this food?**

Is this one of those supernatural things or a natural thing gone supernatural? In other words did God miraculously have bread and meat placed somewhere for the Ravens to pick up and deliver, or did they steal the bread from someone who made it, or pick up road kill to bring to Elijah?

Either way, the food was provided by God and delivered by God through His agents, the Ravens, who by the way can travel in some very large groups, and so quite a lot of food could have been provided by God for Elijah.

But remember, God was causing a famine in the land by not bringing the rains for over 3 years. We're not told how long the brook near Cherith lasted, but brooks are normally smaller than regular rivers. And so, though we don't know how long it took for the brook to dry up it did. So, whether we speculate from weeks to months, God was going to provide for Elijah there for only so long before He would force Elijah to move somewhere else.

1 Kings 17:8-16 ⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁹ "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, 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, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink." ¹¹ As she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." ¹² But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." ¹³ Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring *it* out to me, and afterward you may make *one* for yourself and for your son. ¹⁴ "For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain

on the face of the earth."¹⁵ So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for *many* days.¹⁶ The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.

Now remember that verse 8 tells us that God commanded a widow to provide for Elijah when he gets to Sidon.

So, why is her reaction one that seems not to know of any command from God when Elijah actually shows up and asks for bread and water?

Because the commanding part may not have come until after Elijah asks of her for bread and water. And the reason for this may be something as simple as testing her faith. Keep in mind that the drought has lasted long enough for this woman to concede that they had one more meal and then they would die.

And yet, in the midst of this what does God do, not just for Elijah, but for two other people?

He provides for their immediate needs. **Now does He do this through natural or supernatural means?**

Both. He uses an existing medium in the way of bread and oil, but He causes these two items not to become exhausted.

Where in the N.T. do we see a similar thing?

The feeding of the 5,000.

Mark 6:41-44⁴¹ And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food* and broke the loaves and He kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all.⁴² They all ate and were satisfied,⁴³ and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish.⁴⁴ There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.

By the way, notice that it says that five thousand men who ate the loaves. This doesn't take into account the women and children who would have been following after the men. So, there could have easily been twice the number who were fed by five loaves of bread and two fish.

But back to the woman and her son who think they're going to have their last meal and then die. Sometimes God will bring us to what appears to be the end before He provides a way out.

We'll pick up here next week.