

Elijah

Part 4

The Move to Zarephath

1 Kings 17

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Moving to Zarephath

Now it was time to leave the familiar and move to a country where he would be a stranger. This time it was a very long journey to Zarephath about a mile from the coast near Sidon in what is now Lebanon. With Ahab on the prowl for Elijah it was a risky journey too. So, God told Elijah to go to the coast. Well that might sound good but when there's been no rain and crops don't grow and when animals die as a result you starve - whether you have a view over the sea or not.

Interestingly, Sidon was the only gentile country that the Lord Jesus visited. Also, that's where Jezebel came from and, what's more, her dad was the king!

Now why would God send Elijah to Sidon? In Sidon Elijah would see shrines to Baal all over the place particularly on hills and under spreading trees. There would be Ashera poles too, erected all over the place and there would be all the lurid forms of worship which went with them open to view. Although Elijah had seen this kind of thing back in Israel, it was relatively recent there. On the other hand, the Sidonians had probably worshipped Baal and Asherah for generations. In this place there is every likelihood Elijah that would see it at its worse and I wonder if the Lord knew that here Elijah's loathing for Baal worship would increase to such a pitch that he would one day go back to Israel even more determined to see such worship abolished there.

An Unbeliever Being Obedient to God

Before Elijah arrived, God had already told a widow in Zarephath that he would be coming. We don't know how it did it but we can imagine that she would have been on the lookout for him, just as Elijah was on the lookout for her and she knew that when Elijah showed up she was to show him favour by looking after him.

The widow was not a worshipper of The God of Israel and when she speaks to Elijah she refers to his God. She was a Sidonian and, therefore, likely to be a worshipper of Baal. There may even have been risk for her taking Elijah into her home but, whatever, she was prepared to do it and she became so well thought of by God that she gets mentioned by Jesus (Luke 4:26) when he stands up in the Synagogue in Nazareth and reads from the scroll of Isaiah. As God had already let Elijah know that she was to feed him, it may not have taken him too much be surprise when he saw a widow outside the town gate. It wasn't long before oil and flour was being miraculously provided and we'll look at that more next time. In the meantime we see that this widow, – a Gentile dog in the eye of the Jews shows Elijah favour

In my life, I have not only been shown much favour by Christians but also by those who are not born again believers. The most obvious times it has happened have been in connection with work which is probably not surprising because much our lives are spent at work amongst those who are not born again believers.

I was once taken on with a number of others as a development engineer in a company which designed car transmissions. When I shared my faith there it didn't always go down well but many Christians find that. Anyway, after a short time, the company was threatened with closure and I was to be made redundant along with others. One of the directors whom I didn't know all that well said that he felt bad about taking people on and then finding that the place was going to close. He told me that he'd been out to lunch that day with a patent agent who wanted an assistant and he asked if I was interested in applying. I had no idea what a "patent agent" job entailed but I was married with a mortgage and I was interested in anything. Now why did he give me the opportunity when there were others in the company about to lose their jobs too? I believe God was behind it causing the man to show me favour.

Well I was offered the job as the assistant to the patent agent (and the interview for that was something else!) but it was some years later when I learned that the patent agent who took me on believed that I had extensive experience in vehicle transmissions – which I hadn't. Actually, I was never even asked the question at the interview because it didn't even arise. I didn't even know they wanted someone with extensive experience in transmission. However, by the time that arose, I was well and truly settled in and was handling the transmissions work without any problem. After many years, I took over patent work for the managing director of the old car transmissions company and we became friends – even though he was many years older than I was. When he died a few years ago I found that he had left in his will for me and his chartered accountant a Lagonda vintage car. It was a lovely car too. God's favour again.

There are other instances of favour being shown to me by those who didn't share my faith and I guess you could recount instances in your lives too. It happened in the life of Joseph

Gen 39:2-4

2 The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. NIV

It happened in the life of David

1 Sam 16:22

Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him." NIV

And there's an interesting verse - Proverbs 16:7 -which reads:-

7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him. NIV

God is a good God and will do surprising things for those who love Him and serve Him. We won't necessarily avoid suffering and Elijah suffered the drought like everyone else, but even in circumstances when things are far from

easy, the Lord has ways of providing for us in many unexpected ways. I guess that's because He loves us so much.