

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER THREE

THE DEPARTURE FOR ZAREPHATH

Once, when the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, he delivered them into the hands of the Midianites, a fierce and warlike people; these God employed to drive back his erring and straying sheep under the crook of the Chief Shepherd. There was great distress in Israel at that time. A considerable number of the people forsook house and home, fled to the woods and mountains, or skulked into caverns and rocks; and a few entrenched themselves in deserted fortifications! Whenever they attempted to cultivate the land, the Midianites soon fell upon them, like locusts, destroying all growth in the field, and leaving no sustenance for man or beast. This severe scourge produced its effect. The Israelites acknowledged their sin and smote upon the thigh; every hand was etched to heaven and every tongue prayed, "Return, O Lord, to thine oppressed inheritance!" And God, who is faithful, heard them, and sent them relief.

In the field of Ophrah stood a solitary oak, near it was a threshing-floor. A young husbandman was there threshing his father's corn, and while thus engaged he had to look about him every moment with no little anxiety, for he had reason to fear being surprised by the marauding Midianites. His name was Gideon. In the midst of his busy and anxious occupation he is surprised by the sudden appearance of a stranger of benevolent and noble aspect. The stranger sat down beneath the oak and said, "**The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor!**"

Gideon, with the regard of a true Israelite for his country, replied, "**O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites**" (Judges 6:12, 13).

The history then informs us that the Lord looked upon him and said, "**Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?**" (ver. 14)

"**Go in this thy might,**" said the Lord, as he cast upon him a look of love and grace. He meant not, O Gideon, that thou shouldst subdue the enemy in thine own strength. He directed thee to His strength, and not thine own.

It is as if he had said, "Be this thy strength, that I have regarded thee graciously; and let it encourage thee, let it suffice for thee, that thou hast found grace in eyes of the Lord. Go in this thy strength, and conquer!"

O invaluable assurance! Only possess the assurance that he is graciously inclined toward thee, and thou mayest well be a stranger to fear. Only appropriate such a testimony, that he is thy Beloved, that he is thy Friend, and no storms or tempests need dismay thee any more; thou mayest laugh at the shaking of the spear; yes, though there were thousands of deaths encompassing thee, or thousands of difficulties like mountains surrounding thee—they will all be surmounted. Falter not at thine own natural weakness, be not anxious about thy own ability. Weak or strong, armed or unarmed; in these respects the race is not here to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.

The strength of Immanuel is thine, his love is like a victorious banner over thee; his word is thy sword, his salvation thy helmet, his righteousness thy breastplate; faith in him is thy shield and buckler: he is all that thou requirest; his grace is sufficient for thee.

Whithersoever he sends thee— be it into the fire of temptation or into the waters of affliction— be it into domestic embarrassments and necessities, or into severe conflicts and difficult undertakings— nay, were it even into agony and death—yet his having graciously looked upon thee, and his having made thee sensible of his love, may induce thee to go; yes, go in this thy might! Thou hast no real cause for fear—none for distrust. Thy Saviour will accompany thee and protect thee, because he loveth thee. He whose love is stronger than death, will make all thy way plain before thee. Thus was it that Elijah went to the brook Cherith, in the strength of that kindness and favor which he too had received from his Lord. We are now to view him entering upon a new path of duty, equally painful and difficult in itself, but rendered smooth and easy by the strength of which we have been speaking. Yea, it becomes a path of blessing, because the Lord is with him.

“And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

“Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

“And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah” (I Kings 17:7-16).

We find the prophet still at the brook Cherith. He would not leave his solitude till the Lord bade him remove. The howling wilderness was not too dreary for him; because God was with him. He was quite content to dwell among the rocks, and to rest upon a couch of turf; knowing well, that **“the Lord will provide.”** He was regularly supplied with sustenance, morning and evening, by his faithful messengers, whose very cry as they approached him would serve to awaken his heart to songs of thanksgiving and praise. The little brook of Cherith, whose very name, in the Hebrew language, denotes drought, as if it were generally more apt to dry up than most other brooks, had run on till now, and surely by a miracle; but it was only for an appointed time; for now we behold the scene changing. The change at its commencement was most unexpected and painful—it was also in its further development very mysterious—but its result was as delightful to man as it was glorious to God.

Three subjects here invite our consideration:

- I. Elijah’s perplexity;
- II. His departure from Cherith;
- III. Its blessed issue.

I. He had now, during a whole year, been miraculously fed and preserved

But a miracle perpetuated soon ceases to appear a miracle. And when it begins to be regarded as a matter of course, it fails of its due impression, and God’s hand or Presence in it is liable to be overlooked. There is an Eastern fable, of a boy having challenged his teacher to prove to him the existence of God by working a miracle.

The teacher got a large vessel filled with earth, wherein he deposited a kernel in the boy’s presence, and bade him pay attention. In the place where the kernel was put a green shoot suddenly appeared, the shoot became a stem, the stem put forth leaves and branches, which soon spread over the whole apartment. It then budded with blossoms, which dropping off, left golden fruits in their place, and in the short space of one hour there stood a noble tree in the place of the little seed. The youth, overcome with amazement, exclaimed “Now I know that there is a God, for I have seen his power!” The teacher smiled at him and said, “Simple child, do you only now believe? Does not what you have just beheld take place in innumerable instances, year after year, only by a slower process? But is it the less marvelous on that account?”

Now we, my friends, are but too often like such simple children. Suppose at rising in the morning we found a loaf added to our provisions, which we could be certain that neither we nor any human being had put there—we should then have no difficulty in saying that the Lord had sent it. Yet, we actually find such a loaf every morning added to our provisions, and it is equally true that God has sent it: but because he has sent it in a less direct and extraordinary manner, namely, by strengthening our own powers and blessing our labor to obtain it, and because this is an ordinary case, what is taking place all the world over, therefore, however unreasonable such a therefore may be, we find it difficult to realize in it his goodness, his providence, and himself. And let me tell you, that supposing he were to manifest himself in any extraordinary manner, so as to compel us to exclaim,

“This is indeed a marvelous interposition of God;” yet let any such manifestation only become continual, and it will be no longer accounted marvelous; yea, it will be well if it do not cease to be regarded even as Divine. The manna falls once or twice in the wilderness, and it is wondrous in the eyes of all, and the Lord God is praised. But if it falls every day, its coming is a matter of course; and men learn to contemplate it as a natural event; they behold the manna, but not the hand that sends it. Water is produced miraculously from the rock; and if it be succeeded by heat and drought, men learn in some measure to give God the glory. But the smitten rock in the wilderness virtually follows the Israelitish host; its streams attend them in their daily course; they have no lack of water; and what is the consequence? They are ungrateful: and so are we. God is daily working wonders for us also, but in order to learn this, it is good for us sometimes to undergo privations.

Not that we mean to affirm this respecting Elijah at the brook Cherith. Far be it from us to think so ill of him. But the apostle James says, “**Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are;**” and to any one like ourselves it is very possible for length of time to weaken the impression of what is really wonderful, strengthening to faith, and elevating to the affections; so that Elijah himself might possibly have begun to think, “Ah! This brook flows on only like other rivulets—that is, as long as its spring is supplied!” Thus it is that we children of men are too much disposed to consider things; thus are we apt to put the Divine longsuffering to the test, and as we account it a small thing to weary men, we are fain to weary our God also.

But among the many kind offices which our gracious God has taken upon himself for his children’s sake, there is that which he mentions in Isaiah 46:4, “**Even to hoar hairs will I carry you**” Indeed, how continually has he something to bear with in our conduct! And as he knows how easily a blessing perpetuated ceases to be a blessing, how wisely does he provide, in his faithful love, that there shall be no lack of changes in our earthly course! Hence he leads us through incessant alternations, as it were, of summer and winter, day and night, rain and sunshine, trouble and help, anguish and deliverance. It is thus that he preserves us in spiritual health, and prevents our wandering from himself. For thus we have always something to transact with him; there is constantly something to be asked of him, or something to thank him for; some deliverance from trouble, or some increased humiliation of spirit, some renewed watchfulness, or some more faithful waiting upon him is always needed. Doubtless this was one reason why our gracious God led, the prophet Elijah in such a circuitous way, and gave him to experience so many vicissitudes. How precariously changeful does his life appear! How interwoven with various necessities! Yet, on this very account it abounded in real and lasting blessings.

Our present text commences with the word, “**And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up.**” From this it might be supposed the Elijah was only a short time in the wilderness; but this was not the case. In Genesis, 4:3, immediately after mention of the birth of Cain and Abel we read, “**It came to pass, after a while, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.**” Here the expression “**after a while**” cannot mean a short time, but must indicate a period of several years. And in the history before us the expression “**after a while**” denotes at least a whole year, for so long does Elijah appear to have continued in the wilderness.

For we learn from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, Luke 4:25, as well as from the apostle James, ch. 5:17, that the drought prevailed during three years and six months. Now we find, from I Kings 18:1 that the time when the drought ceased was in the third year of the prophet's residence at Zarephath. Supposing him, therefore, to have been two years and six months at Zarephath, where could he have spent the remaining year, except at the brook Cherith!

That year had now passed over, by the help of God, at one time in faith, at another in sight, certainly under many difficulties, but, on the whole, a thousand times better and more pleasantly than Elijah had probably expected at the commencement. How long he should still remain there he knew not—that he left to God. Perhaps it might be the whole time of the famine. "Well, be it so, it be the Lord's will!" He had hitherto wanted nothing. The ravens did their office; the brook continued to flow, and if it had flowed this year, why should it dry up the next? Such were probably the prophet's pious thoughts at the opening of a new year upon him in the wilderness. But ere long the flow of the brook begins to diminish, and Elijah perhaps can scarcely believe what his eyes behold.

Did not God say, "**Thou shalt drink of the brook,**" and thus virtually promise that water should not fail him? We may well imagine him now observing the brook more accurately. Yes—it is so—the brook is diminishing daily, the bed of the rivulet begins to appear, and soon, where water flowed, all is become dry. "**What meaneth this?**" Even an Elijah might well cast in his mind what manner of providential dealing this should be.

At last water was no longer to be found. O the depths of God! O what peculiar guidance! What a severe trial! "What meaneth it?—to be preserved so long, and now apparently forsaken? Such sure promises, yet such a result! Where is the Lord God of Israel? Am I no longer his prophet? Have I sinned against him, that I am now deserted? Does it repent him that he has employed me?"

Thus might he have thought; and who can say what other imaginations corrupt nature might have suggested, and how the prophet himself might have begun inwardly to complain? Elijah was evidently in a great strait, for death, by thirst, seemed imminent; and what is more, the temptation to false notions and hard thoughts of God was near, to which, if he had yielded, his faith had then dried up, and his confidence had disappeared, like the brook.

Yes, my dear brethren, it is one of the sorest trials that can possibly befall us, when having been placed by the kind providence of God in the midst of peculiar comforts, and just beginning to enjoy them with lively gratitude and hope, we are suddenly torn from them, or bereft of all. Our harp is then turned into mourning and our joy to heaviness.

Let us suppose any one of you to be under severe domestic affliction or embarrassment, in debt for instance, and threatened with an arrest in default of immediate payment. You wrestle with God in prayer that he would help you, and his providence sends you the very help you want.

Your heart is then melted with thankfulness, and you are disposed to say, "Truly the Lord liveth and seeth me; he heareth and answereth prayer!"

But suppose that very night your house is broken into, your money stolen, and all your embarrassment returns. Again, suppose that, with much laborious industry, you have acquired the means of renting a small farm: you employ your whole little capital upon it, and you pray God that it would please him to bless your labor with increase, for the support of yourself and your family. And then you behold the seed sprung up, and your fields beautifully verdant. "Thanks be to God," you will say, "I now see his goodness to his creatures." But in a few more weeks, perhaps a dry summer or a Reason of excessive rain disappoints you of all.

What is your language now, in cases of this sort? Do you not call these hard trials, and account them the more severe because they have come upon you in the ordinary way of Providence? Had they been more like Job's afflictions, something out of the common way, you are apt to imagine you could have borne them better; you would then have seen that they came from God, and you are perhaps vain enough to suppose you would have displayed extraordinary patience under them. For instance, had the money which you had so wonderfully received been melted in your coffer by a thunderbolt, then you would have said, "**The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away**" (Job 1:21). But now, as it has been carried off by thieves, you are apt to think these words of Job inapplicable to your own case; and as you cannot think it is the Lord who has taken it away, you are presently open to another suggestion; "Perhaps it was not the Lord who gave it me, else why should he not have preserved it to me?" In instances like these it is too easy to imagine that God has well-nigh forgotten us, and that we have only been self-deceived in ascribing this and that benefit to his special kindness and love; that they must have been purely accidental, though at the time they appeared marvelous tokens of Divine favor.

In some such manner might Elijah's trial of faith have been aggravated by *the slow and natural* exhaustion of the brook Cherith. Had its stream been discontinued supernaturally and at once, there had been no difficulty in seeing the Lord's hand in this event; but in the present case he might have been tempted by the imagination that nature was very much left to herself. Indeed, the secondary cause why the brook dried up is mentioned in the text; for we read, it "**dried up because there had been no rain in the land:**" and perhaps this is added by the inspired penman, to give us a clearer idea of the trouble which befell Elijah. We can well suppose that it occasioned him no small trial and conflict, and put him upon a severe examination of himself. Corrupt nature might also be stirred within him, and suggest many gloomy and hard thoughts of God. But Elijah surmounted them all, kept his faith in exercise, and thus obtained the victory. The Word of God was his trust; he had not forgotten who it was that said, "**Hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan, and thou shalt drink of the brook.**" He was silent before God in humble faith; in faith he waited, and by faith he crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.

And ye, my Christian friends, whom I may address as brethren of Elijah by the brook Cherith, and in the wilderness of this world, ye children of God, who are apt enough to sigh when your streams dry up, and when your resources seem exhausted; O, if ye did but patiently wait upon the Lord, how strong would ye become! If ye rested more entirely upon his word, ye would see the glory of God! O that, instead of indulging the feelings of distrust and discontent, we did but reflect upon God's exceeding great and precious promises in Christ Jesus! Ought the children of faithful Abraham to despond? Ought they who have surnamed themselves by the name of Israel to be faint-hearted?

But the answer to such expostulations too frequently is, that **“the heart knoweth its own bitterness”** (Proverbs 14:10); and everyone is ready to say **“I am the man who hath seen affliction”** (Luke 3:1). Alas, my brethren, we too impatiently want **“that which is crooked”** to be **“made straight,”** and that which is rough to be made smooth. Yea, we are apt to think our sufferings are directly contrary to the promises of God. But no, fear brethren, this never is, and never can be the fact. What happens to us may be contrary enough our wishes, but can never be contrary to God’s Word.

The truth is, that we have been indulging ideas of our own concerning the manner in which the Lord is to fulfill his promises, and hence arises our mistake. His promises must ever surely come to pass; they are all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 1:20), but as to how they are to come to pass, this we ought entirely to leave to his own wisdom and love, and in the meantime to abide patiently in him who will do all things well, **“He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”** (Romans 8:32) **“Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord and thy Redeemer”** (Isaiah 41:14).

The help you are thus taught to expect is such as will always be best for you. It shall be in things temporal, when that is good for you; and it certainly shall always be in things spiritual, which are far better. When, in a spiritual sense, our brook seems to dry, and we are ready to cry, **“Where is The blessedness I knew?”** when zeal in the cause of Christ abates, and our devotion dies; when we feel no sensible delight in prayer, and the spirit of praise and thanksgiving is gone; when we see nothing around to awaken and encourage us, and the love of many is waxed cold; these exigencies are trying, severely trying. But remember Him who has said of his vineyard,

“I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; I will even keep it night and day” (Isaiah 27:3). **“No really good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly”** (Psalm 84:11).

He will certainly keep his word. Therefore be of good cheer. Spiritual drought and barrenness, if you feel it, shall be turned into a blessing. Believe, then, that he will keep his word—and as to how he shall keep it, let not the clay be at strife with the potter. Let him do with you as seemeth him good; the end of your song will always be, **“O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces”** (Daniel 9: 7).

II. Elijah’s remaining where he was, for the Lord’s sake, who had directed him thither, is a noble example to ourselves

“He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16). Elijah waited, and help arrived, but in what manner? With water? With refreshment and consolation? No! but with a command, which, though it might be acquiesced in by faith, could not possibly be agreeable to flesh and blood.

“Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

Reason was now again constrained to quit the field. Elijah is ordered upon along and toilsome journey, through a wild and barren country, in a time of general famine and extreme drought: and this into the land of Zidon, beyond the borders of Israel, among a heathen people enslaved to a vile idolatry, the native country of Jezebel, his bitterest enemy, and the territory of her father, a furious tyrant, also in alliance with Ahab. **“And behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”**

Strange comfort this to mere natural reason! A woman who has herself lost her chief earthly sustainer; a Phoenician, who might be a heathen, against whose idols Elijah was so zealous. Besides, amongst so many widows in the land, how is this widow to be found? This, indeed, was **“bringing the blind by a way that they knew not”** (Isaiah 42:16). But, **“Be still and know that I am God.”** Psalm 46:10.

His footsteps are not known: yet most of the paths by which he conducts his servants, though they commence in darkness, or at best in twilight, be brighter as they proceed; by-and-by the dayspring begins to dawn and their course shines more and more unto the perfect day.

Zarephath, which was midway between Zidon and Tyre, may signify **“a place of smelting furnaces,”** serving to remind us of the furnace of affliction whereby the Lord tries and purifies his people. The prophet’s whole route seemed to lie directly toward this furnace. But it was a Divine direction; it was the Lord’s will; and therefore it was right to go forward in his name. The prophet, perhaps with sorrow, bids a last farewell to his quiet hiding-place, where he had experienced such signal tokens of the help of God’s countenance; he girds up the loins of his mind, takes his pilgrim staff of the Divine word in the hand of his faith, and sets out for the heathen land. Rough as was his path, it was a way of holiness; no lion was there, nor any ravenous beast could come up thereon. The Lord was with him all the way that he had to go, even the Lord God, who threshes the mountains, rebukes the winds and waves, and revives the spirit of the humble.

III. We soon find him in the neighborhood of Zarephath, and the Lord, who was there before him, had prepared and arranged all for his reception

He had come near the gate of the city, and lo, the widow woman was there gathering sticks for fuel. The Spirit, perhaps, intimated to him that this was the woman to whom he was directed.

Poor as she appeared, by the occupation which now engaged her, his faith could tell him, that if the Lord had appointed her to sustain him, she would have wherewith to do it. With God, who had fed him a whole year by the ministry of ravens at the brook Cherith, he knew that nothing was impossible. And does not God often take a method of helping us which surpasses all reason and expectation, doing for us exceeding abundantly above whatever we can ask or think, and sending us deliverance by means which appear altogether inadequate; that we may learn to give the praise to him, and that his own name may be glorified.

Thoughts like these no doubt passed through Elijah’s mind; and while he fully confided in the Lord as the God of the widow and the fatherless, he found no difficulty in regarding their humble roof as an appropriate dwelling for himself.

“He,” therefore, **“called to her and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.”**

Her readiness to go seems to have encouraged him; for **“as she was going to fetch it,”** he added, **“Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.”**

His additional request, however, opened afresh the wounds of this poor widow’s heart; she could no longer conceal her feelings. She answered, **“As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not even the smallest loaf of bread: all I have is but an handful of flour in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and lo, I have been gathering a stick or two for a fire on my hearth, that I might dress it for myself and for my Child, as our last meal in this world, that we might eat it and die.”**

Oh, how affecting and heartrending was this simple tale! We feel it so, even at this moment. But what says Elijah to it? Can he still believe that this is the widow woman whom the Lord has appointed to sustain him? Yes, he is now certain of it. Be it that she is a widow in peculiar distress, having no other companion but her helpless child; all this creates no difficulty in his mind; **“Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide.”** (Genesis 22:14). And, besides, she seems to know his name, for how has she addressed me? **“As the Lord God liveth.”**

What an unusual and sweet sound is this in a strange land, in an idolatrous country! Perhaps she is a secret worshiper of the living God—a rose in the midst of thorns—a hidden dove in the clefts of the rock—a converted soul—one of the few among the heathen whom the Word of the Lord has reached. Oh, happy thought, to find a brother or a sister in the land of Meshech! Whence does she know that the Lord is my God, and that I am his servant? Oh, the marvelous disposal of Divine Providence!

None but those who have felt it, can know how delightful it is, in a strange country, where there are no ways that direct to Zion, or where they lie waste and deserted, to discover unexpectedly among the children of this world, and as were by the waters of Babylon, some citizen of the Holy Land, some brother or sister in the Lord. Yes, it is an unspeakable delight; and to meet with only one such a person, makes the desert seem to rejoice and blossom as the rose. At such seasons we learn by experience that the children of God are not so deficient in love as they are often supposed to be; we taste the blessedness of that communion in the love of Christ, by which he has enjoined that all men should know we are his true disciples; and occasions of this sort serve to make it manifest.

Yes, what we may here suppose to have been Elijah’s joy, is still tasted in our world. God be thanked, that in every known region of the earth, and even where wolves abound and hirelings profess to feed the flock of Christ, the Good Shepherd has his sheep, the Lord has hidden ones who know him, and who follow him. And as sheep that pasture on barren plains often bear the finest fleeces, so is it often with the sheep of Christ; and as they know their Shepherd, or rather are known of him, so it is as wonderful as it is delightful to find how readily they know and acknowledge one another.

Elijah perceiving that this was the widow of whom God had spoken to him, hesitated not to address her in the most encouraging manner. He **“said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.”**

And now she evinced that she was indeed the widow whom the Lord God of Elijah had appointed to sustain him; for **“she went”** in faith, **“and did according to the Saying of Elijah; and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.”**

How blessed is the way of faith!

Behold, then, this man of God cheerfully sitting down in her solitary cottage. Surely **“the voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous,”** for **“the right hand of the Lord”** on their behalf **“doeth valiantly”** (Psalm 118:15). They rejoice together, not only on account of temporal blessings, but much more on account of those which are spiritual. Israel had lost Elijah, and a poor widow in a heathen land had found him. Thus often does it fare with a people who, though they have been privileged with the most faithful preaching of the Gospel, will not turn unto the Lord with all their heart, and walk uprightly before him. They are cursed with a famine of the Word of God; the children’s bread is taken from them, and imparted to others whom they account no better than dogs, who however **“will receive it,”** and are languishing for it.

Indeed our Lord himself thus applies this part of sacred history to the case of the people of Nazareth who refused to receive his ministry: **“I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow”** (Luke 4:25, 26).

Here then the prophet dwells quite happy under the widow’s roof. All distress has disappeared. The meal is not diminished in the barrel, nor fails the oil in the cruse, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Elijah. Neither does their spiritual sustenance fail. Well might this poor widow rejoice in the privilege of sitting daily at the feet of this man of God, for instruction in divine things!

Can we doubt for a moment that the prophet most gladly opened his mouth in divine wisdom, to impart it to the soul of this simple believing sister? Can I doubt that they prayed together, that they read together out of Moses and the prophets, and that they conversed together of the day of Christ, which Abraham saw with gladness?

And would they not, think you, occasionally raise a spiritual song to the honor of their Lord and Saviour? How swiftly and how pleasantly must the hours have passed with them! And well might the angels of God have rejoiced, as no doubt they did, over this little church in the wilderness!

Behold here, then, my brethren, the bright egress and happy termination of a path which commenced in such thick darkness! Only let all the children of God implicitly follow his guidance, and he will assuredly conduct them to a glorious end.

It is a noble testimony which is here borne respecting Elijah when he was commanded away from his retreat at Cherith—it is said of him, “**So he arose and went to Zarephath.**”

Let it then be equally said of you, to whatever duty the Lord may call you away, “**He arose and went!**” Be the way ever so laborious or dangerous, still arise, like Elijah, and go. Go cheerfully, in faith, keeping your heart quietly dependent on the Lord, and in the end you will assuredly behold and sing of his goodness.

Though tossed on a sea of troubles, you may lay anchor on the firm foundation of God, which standeth sure.

You have for your security his exceeding great and precious promises, and must say with the psalmist, “**Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!**” (Psalm 42:11).

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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