

OT LESSON #28
“AFTER THE FIRE A STILL SMALL VOICE”

By Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: We do not understand with perfect clarity the activities of those in Paradise, but I have wondered what Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were doing during the reigns of Jeroboam and his appalling successors. We know they are Gods now (see D&C 132:37), but in those early years of apostasy, the view from above must have been heartrending.

In 875 BC Ahab ascended to the throne in Samaria. “And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him” (1 Kings 16:30). He was bad enough on his own, but he compounded the depth of his iniquity when he chose a wife:

And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him (1 Kings 16:31-33).

During the reign of Ahab God did what he has always done when his people wander away from their covenants and begin the service of false Gods. He sent a prophet—in this case a man whose name and deeds have echoed across the centuries, and whose presence has been pivotal in at least two dispensations besides his own—a prophet named Elijah.

1. ELIJAH SEALS UP THE HEAVENS, IS MIRACULOUSLY SUSTAINED, AND RAISES A WIDOW’S SON FROM THE DEAD.

AND Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word (1 Kings 17:1).

God has many ways of getting people’s attention. You might consider a review of D&C 43:25 where many of these methods are listed. God has

often used the weather to alert people to his commandments and his will. But in this case he announced the drought beforehand and then had Elijah add a remarkable postscript: “there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” He then promptly disappeared.

And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there (1 Kings 17:2-4).

At first the people (including Ahab) who knew of the warning might have been laughing. Baal worshipers were not much into divine weather control. One wonders how many months went by without dew *or* rain before Ahab began to send out the search parties. And as the months continued to pass—up to 36 of them without a drop of moisture—Ahab and his people progressed from concern to fear to terror. But, apparently, they did not progress to repentance,

The people in the days of Nephi, son of Helaman responded with reformation to a similar circumstance:

For the earth was smitten that it was dry, and did not yield forth grain in the season of grain; and the whole earth was smitten, even among the Lamanites as well as among the Nephites, so that they were smitten that they did perish by thousands in the more wicked parts of the land. And it came to pass that the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God; and they began to remember the words of Nephi. And the people began to plead with their chief judges and their leaders, that they would say unto Nephi: Behold, we know that thou art a man of God, and therefore cry unto the Lord our God that he turn away from us this famine, lest all the words which thou hast spoken concerning our destruction be fulfilled (Helaman 11:6-8).

Why had God chosen Elijah to exercise such power? I think it was more than the confluence of need and opportunity. One phrase from 1 Kings 17 tells us much about what made this man powerful: “he went and did

according unto the word of the LORD” (I Kings 17:5). How would you like that for an epitaph on your tombstone? Anyway, there must be a correlation between power and obedience.

Ahab would not have dreamed of searching for Elijah in a place where there was no food. But he searched everywhere else. Obadiah told Elijah

As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom,
whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said,
He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that
they found thee not.

Note that Ahab believes that rain will only come at the command of Elijah, and still there is no nuance of repentance in him.

The ravens supplied Elijah with food and he remained hidden until the drought dried up the brook. Then Elijah was commanded to go to “Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1Kings 17: 9).

We must learn a lesson from the Lord’s care for Elijah. The ravens were ready. A widow was willing. God can help us meet our needs if we are diligent in his service. And he almost always helps us through the intervention of his disciples. The ravens were much more the exception than the rule. Like the manna in the wilderness, they were a special provision for a special time and place. But mostly the help we need and pray for comes from those who, like the widow of Zarephath, are willing to do good. These are people who follow the promptings of the Spirit, without knowing many times that they have been prompted at all.

And not all of that divinely directed assistance concerns physical challenges. I love this little story from the *Ensign*. It is called “Fresh Crab and French Bread.”

It was a typical winter day in San Francisco, cool and damp. We had lived there a few years before and were back renewing memories. Seeing the large, steaming crab vats as we walked along Fisherman’s Wharf, I exclaimed, “Oh, let’s take some crab home to Emma.”

“Crab?” asked my husband. “Why crab?”

“I don’t know. Maybe she would enjoy it.”

Sensing my ever-present desire to bring cheer to a grieving widow in our ward, Ron counseled me to find a more easily transported gift. He suggested that we find something more suitable in one of the souvenir shops beckoning us.

In and out of the shops we went, searching in vain for just the right memento. Empty-handed and tired, we started for our car, only to pass the crab vats once more.

“Ron, I still want to take some crab to Emma,” I pleaded.

He was still resistant to hauling crab 150 miles, especially when I wasn’t even sure Emma liked it. Nevertheless, we asked the vendor about transporting un-refrigerated crab that distance.

Soon we were crossing the Bay Bridge with the crab carefully wrapped in many thicknesses of paper; a long loaf of the Wharf’s famous french bread was tucked in the side of the sack.

On the trip home my thoughts turned to Emma. I remembered the sacrament meeting ten months before when Emma, her husband, Ed, and their oldest son, David, had spoken just before David left to serve a mission. That was the last time we saw Ed. After accompanying David to the Missionary Training Center, Ed suffered a fatal heart attack while still in Utah. He never returned to California.

Ed was a gifted surgeon, highly respected in our community. His passing was felt deeply. In addition to Emma, he left six children, the youngest just a toddler.

Though many grieved with the family, it was difficult to express their sympathy because Emma was extremely reserved and quiet. Few knew her well. As the months went on, her sorrow did not seem to lessen. Grief and poor health found her withdrawing from activity outside her home.

I was determined to be her friend, her sister in the gospel, and not let fear or personal rejection dilute my concern. Each week I went to her home, sometimes to be invited in while she shared her heartache. Other times she met me at the door but quickly terminated the visit with, "Thank you for coming."

As I rang the doorbell that day I could hear many feet running to answer. The door opened. Emma, surrounded by her children, stood there puzzled at my brown sack and protruding loaf of bread.

"Yes?" she inquired.

My spirits were dampened by her coolness, but I faked enthusiasm over our trip to the city and the gift we had brought.

As she took the fresh crab and french bread, Emma asked, "Is this for any special occasion?"

"No," I replied, "I just thought you might enjoy some crab from the Wharf."

"Thank you very much," she said, expressionless, and closed the door.

I returned to the car and slumped down into the seat, deflated. All I could say to Ron was, "I'm not sure Emma likes crab." We finished the drive home in silence.

Two days later came the following letter:

My dear friends:

I was very touched by your kind gesture last night and feel compelled to share a few thoughts with you.

Yesterday morning began with the usual daily tasks. I was out sweeping the walks when I looked up to the heavens and, noting the vast, billowing, white clouds, asked, "Ed, do you know what day this is? Do dates have a meaning in heaven? Can you possibly know how much I love you and how desperately you are missed; how I long to be

taken into your strong arms and held again just for a minute?”
With tear-stained cheeks I wanted to know if he remembered
twenty-three years ago, or even two years ago this day.

All day long memories came rushing back. I remembered our first trip
to San Francisco and how cold it was as we walked by the steaming
crab pots at the Wharf. Ed was so handsome in his Navy uniform. He
always took my hand in his, and holding it tight placed both in his
overcoat pocket. How comforting the warmth was. I could see him
sitting in the cable car, with his boyish grin, a loaf of bread and a crab
under each arm. So many times he repeated this procedure.
San Francisco was our playground. I cannot begin to count the
number of seminars and scientific meetings we attended there. To
learn more was almost a disease with Ed. After each session we
always ended our stay by going to the Wharf. A loaf of bread and a
fresh crab became symbolic of a wonderful time together. Now that
he’s gone, I wonder what mysteries of heaven he is exploring, what
avenues are being opened to him. So many unanswered questions ...
so impatient I am.

Yesterday was a difficult day to get through. In late afternoon a
beautiful floral arrangement arrived with a card from the children
declaring their love for me. It was heartwarming. As I looked at the two
little ones, then at Eddie and Janet and Miriam—then remembered
David—I could see a part of Ed in each and realized that my cup
runneth over.

Then at the close of day when I opened the door and saw you
standing there with a loaf of bread and a package of fresh crab, it was
like a direct message. You denied knowing it was a special day.
Therefore I felt it was Ed’s way of saying, “Happy anniversary. I do
remember.”

As ever,
Emma

(Garnee Faulkner, “Fresh Crab and French Bread,” *Ensign*, June
1985, 38)

[If you have stories like this—stories about being directed to do good without

knowing you were being directed, I would love to hear them. Share with me if you are willing, at [<tedgibbons@yahoo.com>.](mailto:tedgibbons@yahoo.com)

I love the faith of this widow of Zarephath

. I love the faith of all widows. My own mother became a widow when I was 17. I was continually astonished at the depth of her spirituality. The impoverished widow of Zarephath was about to cook her final meal. There was nothing else for her and her son to eat. But when she was asked to share with Elijah, she shared. With astonishing faith in his promise of sufficient food (“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” [1 Kings 17:14]), she made him a small meal and trusted in the goodness of God. That trust was rewarded.

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 (1 Kings 17:15,16).

I hope you pause often in your study of these marvelous stories to search for the lessons. Did the Lord intend that we should learn something about ourselves from this story? Did he intend that we should learn something about him?

Here is another story from the *Ensign* to illustrate this principle.

One Shovelful of Coal

By Marjorie A. McCormick

World War II had been over for almost two years, but we were still on rations.

It was February 1947, one of the hardest winters anyone could remember. Our home town of Bradford, Yorkshire, England, was the coldest spot in the nation, and it had snowed off and on for six weeks.

By now the drifted snow was higher than our heads—that meant no cart could reach us to deliver our ration of coal. And we were running

low.

There were six of us living together that winter—my husband and I, our two children, a young man who had been turned out of his own home when he joined the Church, and a woman whose daughter was serving a mission. We did our best to keep warm, but we were almost out of fuel and we only had electricity at certain hours during the day. (Most of our power stations had been badly bombed during the war.)

It was Saturday when my husband went down to the cellar and carefully sifted the coal from the dust. All that remained was one shovelful of coal and a few cans of coal dust.

At church the next day, we received a shopping bag full of wood. The elders had sawed the wood from old railroad ties and stored it in the basement of the church. With this wood and our little pile of coal, we had fuel enough for one more day.

That evening we knelt in prayer and asked the Lord to help us. As we prayed, our helplessness gave way to a sense of peace. When we went to bed, we felt content to leave the situation in the Lord's hands.

On Monday morning I put some wood, a can of dust, and the remaining coal into the fireplace. Then I waited until afternoon to start the fire—I wanted the house to be as warm as possible when the children got home from school.

The fire lasted until nine or ten that night. We were amazed to discover that all six of us kept warm and comfortable from the one little fire through the entire evening. My husband added a can of dust and one log, but that was all.

The next morning I cleaned out the fireplace and began to lay paper and wood as I had the day before. Then I plucked up my courage and faith and went down to the cellar. Not knowing quite what to expect, I opened the door. There, in the same corner where it had been yesterday, was a stack of coal that looked just like the coal we had burned the night before. I had the strangest feeling—had an angel brought it? I had no answer for my question, but I reverently scooped

up the coal and took it upstairs.

How grateful we were that night for our miraculous fire. Our prayers were prayers of appreciation and praise.

The next morning when I went down to the cellar I found another stack of coal in the same corner. It was just enough. This miracle occurred every day that week until Saturday. By that time my husband felt that the snow had melted enough so that he would finally be able to get us some coal.

He took the children's sled, and as soon as he left I went down to the cellar. As soon as I saw the corner I knew that he would bring back some coal; there was no coal in the cellar.

Later that day my husband brought back two lovely hundredweight sacks of coal.

I still have no explanation for this incident. All I know is that it did happen and six of us witnessed it. And we know that God lives and answers prayers (Marjorie A. McCormick, "One Shovelful of Coal," *Ensign*, Oct. 1979, 49,50).

Have you ever been deterred from giving because you had so little to give? This widow shows us that the attitude with which we give matters much more than the amount we are able to give. If we give all we have, it will always be enough. Remember the small boy with his loaves and fishes? "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? (John 6:9). The answer to the question, "what are they among so many?" will always be, "Enough; enough to feed a multitude." When we give all we have, it will always be enough.

Remember the widow in the New Testament making a contribution to the temple treasury?

And he called [unto him] his disciples, and saith unto them,
Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in,
than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did
cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that

she had, [even] all her living (Mark 12:43,44).

Would the Lord withhold blessings from her because she did not give enough? The few drops of oil and the measures of flour, given with open generosity and trust, is more than a tanker of Canola Oil and the harvest of a hundred acres of wheat.

But the miraculous multiplication of the oil and flour was not the greatest miracle this woman was to see. When her son died, Elijah restored him to life and to his mother. I suspect that on a spiritual level, bringing the prophet into our homes will always give us and our children life. Have you brought President Hinckley's teachings and counsel into your home? In what ways? What blessings have come to you because you have given him access to your family?

2. ELIJAH CHALLENGES THE PRIESTS OF BAAL AND OPENS THE HEAVENS FOR RAIN.

In the third year Elijah made his way to Ahab.

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, [Art] thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kings 18:17,18).

It is always difficult for the unrepentant to isolate the cause of their distress. Ahab blamed Elijah for the lack of rain, rather than his own iniquity or the iniquity of his people. In what ways might we be like that? Why is it so difficult for us to look inside ourselves for the causes of our problems?

Elijah said to his adversary:

Now therefore send, [and] gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table (1 Kings 18:19).

And Ahab had to comply. The need for moisture was a larger consideration

than any amount of pride or rebellion. If this man who had sealed the heavens wanted a convocation on Mt. Carmel, he could have it.

Elijah spoke to the 850 false prophets and all of Israel. His question is one for all the ages of men. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21), *For goodness sakes, make up your mind about God and your relationship with him!*

Do you know people who are struggling to choose between God and the world? Between riches and righteousness? Between friends and faithfulness?

Elijah organized a contest between Baal and God involving divine intervention in the offering of sacrifice. The false prophets and priests failed in their efforts to call forth a display of power from Baal. Then, in the evening, Elijah prayed,

And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again (1 Kings 18:36,37).

This man who had sealed the heavens now offered to gathered Israel a second evidence of the power of God.

Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God (1 Kings 18:38,39).

The rains came but still no sign or repentance. Jezebel, upon hearing of the death of her false prophets, swore to end the life of Elijah. No multitude of zealous Israelites intervened to protect him. Did the people still fear Jezebel more than God? Elijah was forced to flee for his life, and ended his journey at Mt. Horeb which is Mt. Sinai (see 1 Kings 19:3-8).

3. ELIJAH IS COMFORTED BY THE HOLY GHOST AND INSTRUCTED TO CONTINUE IN GOD'S WORK.

Elijah seemed to be convinced that his ministry had failed and that he was the only faithful Israelite left. He must have wondered how the years of drought and famine, and the spectacular display of power on Carmel could have failed to reclaim his people. Perhaps this the underlying purpose behind the lesson God taught him so eloquently at Mt. Horeb.

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice (1 Kings 19:11,12).

President Packer spoke of this matter of the still small voice and of our need to learn to hear it.

Many years ago John Burroughs, a naturalist, one summer evening was walking through a crowded park. Above the sounds of city life he heard the song of a bird.

He stopped and listened! Those with him had not heard it. He looked around. No one else had noticed it.

It bothered him that everyone should miss something so beautiful.

He took a coin from his pocket and flipped it into the air. It struck the pavement with a ring, no louder than the song of the bird. Everyone turned; they could hear that! (Boyd K. Packer, "Prayers and Answers," Ensign, Nov. 1979, 19)

We can all hear the great winds and the earthquakes. We can all hear the sound of money. Those divine and penetrating echoes from eternity are the ones we most often miss.

It is difficult to separate from the confusion of life that quiet voice of inspiration.

Answers to prayer come in a quite way. The scriptures describe that voice of inspiration as a still, small voice.

If you really try, you can learn to respond to that voice ((Boyd K. Packer, "Prayers and Answers," Ensign, Nov. 1979, 19,20)

Joseph Smith learned to hear that voice clearly. He testified:

Yea, thus saith the still, small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things, and often times it maketh my bones to quake while it maketh manifest . . . (D&C 85:6).

Do your bones quake from the still small voice, or does the Lord need something a little stronger to get your attention?

CONCLUSION: There are many lessons to be learned here. One of the most important has to do with the failure of miracles and signs to reform the Israelite nation. The role of miracles in true conversion is problematic. If people could be truly converted—that is, converted to a lifetime of righteousness and obedience—by miracles, God would surely use them. But mostly he does not, not for skeptics and unbelievers. Richard Bushman wrote of this matter. Joseph was surrounded by enemies and doubters. In such conditions,

Joseph Smith might have been expected to answer the skeptics' charges with miraculous "proof." After all, the scriptures promised signs to believers. But Joseph Smith didn't. Why?

The answer lies in the Lord's reply to those who sought signs and miracles as "proof." In July 1830 the Lord told Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to "require not miracles." (D&C 24:13.) "He that seeketh signs shall see signs, but not unto salvation," the Lord said a year later. (D&C 63:7.) "Faith cometh not by signs," he continued, "but signs follow those that believe. . . . Wherefore, I, the Lord, am not pleased with those among you who have sought after signs and wonders for faith, and not for the good of

men unto my glory.” (D&C 63:9–12.) Miracles occur to bless the faithful, not to convert skeptics (Richard Bushman, “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1990, 62).

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