



Elijah proclaiming the drought.

THE EVENING OF THE MONARCHY STUDIES IN KINGS AND CHRONICLES LESSON 4

Elijah, A Man Just Like Us (1 of a 4 Part Series)

We are beginning a series on Elijah and Elisha, within the series of “The Evening Of The Monarchy.” Elijah and Elisha are certainly two of the greatest figures of the Old Testament. We will teach Elijah, the older and more famous of the two, for four lessons, and then cover three more lessons on Elisha.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ISRAEL IN THE TIME OF ELIJAH

A. The National Decline

The year is about 870 BC. Israel has been split into two kingdoms for over sixty years: the southern kingdom, Judah (Jerusalem), and the northern kingdom, Israel (Samaria).

In the southern kingdom of Judah, there were occasionally kings who did good in the sight of the Lord, like Uzziah and Hezekiah. In the northern kingdom, there were no good kings of whom it could be said in the record of Scripture, “they did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.” In fact, all eighteen of Jeroboam’s successors continued his substitute form of worship, which God held against each as a serious sin. The descriptive sentence, “And he did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in his sin which he made Israel sin,” is repeated with variations of most of Jeroboam’s descendants (1 Kings. 15:26).

Kingship in Israel was very unstable which led to an unstable government - while a few family dynasties lasted several generations, there was no established dynasty that ruled the land - when the old king died, deciding on a new king was often a bloody process Israel was in a more difficult situation than Judah

Later on Israel was much closer to the domineering power of Assyria than was Judah - the domination of Assyria was felt far more in Israel than in Judah. Israel's territory included fertile valleys, which were far more attractive to Assyria than the Judean wilderness

Egypt gave nominal support to Judah to keep Judah as a buffer between itself and Assyria but Egypt was not concerned to support Israel. Israel was tempted by Syria and others among its neighbors into suicidal rebellions against Assyria

B. Royal Decline

Not only were these kings evil, but there was a continuous decline. Scripture indicates that the next king was worse than his father. There was continual spiritual and moral erosion. King Omri of Israel is only briefly listed (1 Kings 16:15-28) but his name is mentioned in texts outside of Israel as an important and influential king. It was Omri who moved the northern capital to Samaria. The texts of other nations refer to Israel as the "land of Omri." Omri was much like David (Not spiritually). He chose a location for his capital that would be ideal for ruling his nation just as David did. He purchased a hill and built his capital city, Samaria, just as David had captured and built Jerusalem as his city

Ahab is the latest in a series of kings in the north who do not follow the one true God. In fact, he has led the Israelites into the deepest apostasy yet (1 Kings 16:30-32). Ahab not only imitated the sin of Jeroboam by permitting the worship of false gods; he also married the Sidonian princess, Jezebel and together they made the worship of Baal, which involved (among other things) offering infant children on the glowing bronze arms of the idol, the national religion.

With the rise of Ahab in the time of Elijah, morals and the culture had bottomed out. Fifty-eight years had passed since the division of the kingdom. Seven kings had reigned and all were evil. All were idolatrous, but with Ahab idolatry reached an all-time low, even to the point of seeking to stamp out the worship of Jehovah altogether.

An interesting historical note is found in 1 Kings 16:32-34. After a statement of how Ahab

provoked the Lord with his idolatry more than all the kings of Israel, there is a seemingly out-of-place reference to the death of the two sons of Hiel who fortified Jericho. But this was a reminder that God's promises and warnings are true. They do come to pass. As Hiel had disregarded God's sure curse on anyone who fortified Jericho (Josh. 6:26), so Israel had disregarded the promised discipline of God for disobedience (Deut. 11:8-17). Here God gave Israel a reminder to demonstrate emphatically that not only is God's Word true, but God is involved in the life of the nations (including Israel), and Israel was ripe for judgment.

C. Ahab and Jezebel

Ahab married Jezebel, the princess from Tyre, daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre and high priest of Baal. Again, his aim was to seal a pact with Phoenicia for political reasons. The weak Ahab allowed Jezebel to introduce the worship of the satanic and idolatrous cult of Baal-Melqart into Israel. The worship of Baal, a Canaanite deity, had been observed by Israelites in the days of the Judges and before the establishment of the kingdom. David rid the land of this filth, but now it was resurrected on a new scale, larger than ever, and by government sanction, even that of the king.

Jezebel was competent, manipulative, scheming, and persistent. She was highly dominant and held a great amount of influence over Ahab. Jezebel did not want Baalism to coexist with the worship of Jehovah. She wanted to completely stamp out the worship of God. Thus Jezebel slaughtered every prophet she could get her hands on (I Kings. 18:4).

(Today, humanism and the New Age movement would like nothing better than to stamp out Christianity because it stands in the way of Satan's world wide purposes. People seem to be tolerant of everything but the truth. When the New Order comes, it will be because those religions that will not accept the lie that man is God will be systematically eliminated by whatever means is necessary. Disarmament may be the guise used to get the nations of the world to surrender their sovereignty to an authoritative global political machine, which will in turn use those weapons (if necessary) to force everyone, especially the religious objectors, to get on board with the new agenda.)

D. Worship of Baal as the State Religion

1. The essence of Baal worship

Baal was the most popular of Canaan's deities because he was considered the god of fertility in all aspects of life--human, animal, and vegetable. Production and prosperity were dependent on Baal. He was supposedly the god who had power over rain, wind, clouds, and therefore over fertility. Baal was also worshipped as the weather god, the god of storm, of rain, and good crops. This is very important to the background of 1 Kings 17-19 with the story of the drought and the contest on Mount Carmel.

Each area worshipped its own Baal. A city or place name where Baal was being worshipped was frequently added to his name, e.g., Baal-Meon, Baal-Hermon, Baal-Hazor, Baal-Zebub, Baal-Marduk, and Baal-Peor. In Elijah's time, Israel worshipped Baal-Melqart because this was the form of Baalism worshipped at Tyre.

2. The elements of Baal worship

- a. The offering of incense and burnt sacrifices (Jer. 7:9);**
- b. Sometimes the offering of human sacrifices (Jer. 19:5);**
- c. It especially included licentious sexual activity--including sodomy (cf. 1 Kings. 14:23,24; 15:12; with 22:46).**

The slaughter of innocent children and sodomy are sure indications that the culture and morals of a society have bottomed out. (We can obviously see the clear parallel to our country today with the very political gay movement and the slaughter of millions of unborn children (called fetuses by those who call themselves pro-choice)).

God had promised blessing for obedience, but cursing for disobedience. The curses included shutting up the heavens and no rain meant no production (Deut. 11:8-17; 28:1f, 23-24).

E. The Challenge to Baal Worship

Elijah's sudden, dramatic, brave, bold entrance and declaration 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," proposes a direct confrontation between Jehovah, the living and true God of Scripture, and Baal-Melqart, one of the heathen deities of ancient Babylon.

God was dramatically challenging Baalism, or the belief of the people in Baal, on the very thing they worshipped Baal for—rain! On the one side there was Ahab the King, the ruthless and notorious Jezebel, the impotent and false god Baal, and the Baal priests and priestesses. On the other side was Jehovah and a single servant, the prophet Elijah, a man of faith, deeply committed to God.

II. ELIJAH'S BACKGROUND**A. His Name**

"Elijah" literally means "Jehovah is God." We can only guess at the strength and faith of his mother and father to give Elijah a name like that in the midst of Baal worship.

Elijah is a prophet, an official spokesman for God to remind his people of the covenant they entered into with Him, and to call them back to Him. Much like Melchizedek, he simply emerges out of obscurity from the standpoint of the record of Scripture. Nothing is mentioned about his parents, his ancestry, training, or early life

B. His Home Town

He was from Tishbe, a city in the sticks (we don't know the exact location) east of Jordan in the land called Gilead. One source says that "*Tishbe*" means "captivity." It certainly is a derivative of *shabah*, meaning "to take captive." In view of God's warnings in Deuteronomy 28:15-37, this could have stood as a warning of eventual captivity if Israel refused to repent and turn to the Lord. He is called "Elijah, the Tishbite" six times and was well known by this title (cf. I Kings. 17:1; 21:17, 28; II Kings. 1:3, 8; 9:36). (See Studies in the Life of Elijah by J. Hampton Keathley III.)

The name Gilead means "a rocky region" and refers to a mountainous area east of the Jordan that was comparatively uninhabited. It was an area well adapted for spending time alone with God. The phrase may be suggestive of his lifestyle as a sojourner, as one whose focus was on the things of God.

Why is Gilead mentioned? Gilead demonstrates the historical reality of Elijah and throws additional light on Elijah's background. This gives us more insight into the forces forming the character of the prophet. How should we understand and apply this? It shows us Elijah was not out of the seminary of Samaria. The people of the rocky hill country of Gilead were rough, tough, rugged, and perhaps somewhat solemn and stern. They dwelt close to God's creation in crude villages as shepherds rather than in the lavish surroundings of the palace. Such surroundings tend to spoil people's character and make them soft rather than tough and rugged. The people of Gilead were hardened and disciplined by the weather and walking over the mountainous terrain. They possessed great physical strength, and such a life also gave them character. Remember the contrasts between David and Solomon? Elijah was what we could call a mountain man. But he was a mountain man who walked with God.— ibid

C. His Identity

He is simply called "the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead." In other words, he was not on Israel's "Who's Who" list. He was known as a prophet, as the account that follows suggests. However, Scripture places very little emphasis on his background. We can learn a principle from here – other than being godly people of faith who are available to be used of God, it is never really who and what we are that counts.

Here was a man who was close to God, a man to whom God was very real and God used Him. In the final analysis, what really matters is who and what God is. Knowing who God is should

strengthen our faith in Him so that it affects what we are, what we say, and what we do. By contrast, it seems people always want to know, "Who are you?" "Who is he or she?" People can look at their accomplishments, as Nebuchadnezzar did and "proudly" credit them to their own brilliance.

It is easy to think as Moses did, "Who am I?" This kind of thinking puts the focus on us, rather than on the sovereign God, upon whom we are totally dependent and who is always able to do super abundantly above all that we are able to ask or even think. When John the Baptist, Elijah's New Testament counterpart was asked, "Who are you?" His answer was, "I am just a voice!" He was emphasizing that he was merely an instrument of the living God Who was there to help them recognize and believe in the living and true God.

D. His Training

Again, we know nothing of his training, but one day he stormed into Ahab's presence in Samaria to announce that God was bringing a drought to Israel because of their apostasy. Where did Elijah get this idea? From his knowledge of Scripture. God had warned Israel of this in Deuteronomy 11:16,17. Elijah was merely God's spokesman who was announcing the fulfillment of this prediction.

Thus begins a conflict between Ahab and Elijah – which personifies the conflict between Jehovah and Baal – and which will reach its dramatic, public climax on Mt. Carmel three years later when Elijah takes on Ahab and several hundred prophets of Baal. In between, though, God hides Elijah from Ahab.

E. His Appearance

1. The description of his dress

His dress and appearance are mentioned in 2 Kings 1:7-8. Perhaps the people were a little awed by the prophet's distinctive looks and manner. He wore a garment of black camel's hair girded with a leather belt about his waist to hold in his garment for freer movement. This was to become the official dress of a prophet (Zech. 13:4). It must have stood in striking contrast to the affluent inhabitants of Samaria, and especially the Baal priests.

2. The symbolism of his dress

a. It symbolized his chosen poverty and priorities.

Material things were not on his priority list.

b. It symbolized His separation and denouncement of the world

He was not controlled by the lifestyle of the world. He was separated to the Lord as God's servant.

c. It symbolized His official office and purpose in life

He was a proclaimer of the Word of God. He knew who he was, where he was and why he was there.

F. His Representation

The hero or heroine of any heroic narrative is a representative person. In other words, the story and its hero capture the universal human situation. The historian tells us what happened, but literary narrative in the Bible tells us more. It shows us what happens in life. The hero, then, becomes a model, an example for faith, for spiritual experience and life, and the conflict he is in becomes an illustration of what we face in life.

Values and virtues, failures and weaknesses, strengths and abilities of the hero and the conflicts he and his society faced show us this is the way life is. They reveal what we need to know, to appropriate, and to avoid as we live in our society.

III. ELIJAH, THE MAN OF PASSIONS

A. He was just like a us

We tend to want to believe that people like Elijah are quite different from us. That helps to salve our consciences and give us excuses. However, James 5:16b-17 destroys our comfortable

theory.

1. The faithful prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much and be used dramatically for God (James 5:16b).

2. Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours. (James 5:17)

While Elijah was spiritually head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries, he was at the same time normal, perhaps even average from the standpoint of innate or natural qualities and abilities.

Elijah possessed a sinful nature just like ours, with weaknesses, fears, and doubts just like everyone else. In fact, his humanness will clearly emerge later in the record of his life and ministry.

But, by faith, Elijah rose above his weaknesses through the divine resources at his disposal. The *same resources* are available to us in the Lord in even more abundant ways today through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

B. He Was A Man Of Passions

Everything Elijah did seems to be done with passion. There is a volcanic suddenness, and a volcanic violence, indeed, about all Elijah's appearances upon us and all his disappearances from us. Elijah swings from brilliant victory to deep discouragement.

We never see Elijah that he is not subject to some passion or other. A passion of scorn and contempt; a passion of anger and revenge; a passion of sadness and dejection and despair; a passion of preaching; a passion of prayer. Elijah was a great man. There was a great mass of manhood in Elijah. He was a Mount-Sinai of a man, with a heart like a thunderstorm. That man among ourselves who has the most human nature in him and the most heart; the most heart and the most passion in his heart; the most love and the most hate; the most anger and the most meekness; the most scorn and the most sympathy; the most sunshine and the most melancholy; the most agony in prayer, and the most victorious assurance that, all the time, his prayer is already answered—that man is the likeliest of us all to the prophet Elijah; that man has Elijah's own mantle fallen upon him....

The difference between Elijah and Ahab was in the subject of their passions. Elijah was a man of immensely stronger passions than poor Ahab ever was; only Elijah's powerful passions all swept him up to heaven, whereas all Ahab's contemptible passions shouldered and shoveled and sucked him down to hell, Queen Jezebel, also, Ahab's wife, when she was still a woman child, her passions were as sweet and pure and good and subject as were the passions of the Virgin Mary herself. The whole difference between Elijah and Ahab, and between Jezebel and the mother of our Lord was in their hearts' desires, till their hearts' desires grew up into all-consuming passions. – Alexander Whyte, Whytes Bible Characters

C. He Was A Man of Prayer

Elijah is well known as a man of prayer. James, whom tradition tells us was known as “camel knees” because of his own prayer life, uses Elijah as an example of the power of the prayer of a righteous man. “The effective prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months” (James 5:16b-17).

Elijah boldly proclaimed to King Ahab, “Surely, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” (I Kings 17:1b) Putting these two passages together we know this was the result of Elijah's prayers.

His declaration, like his courage, was the product of intimately knowing God and living in close fellowship with the Lord through the Word and prayer. In the process, God's purposes, burdens, values, and desires became his own. He prayed for the termination of rain in accord with the warnings and principles of Deuteronomy (Deut. 11:16-17; 28:23-24). Then, convinced of God's faithfulness, he boldly declared his message to King Ahab.

If you want a pattern for your prayer life, if you want to increase the effectiveness of your prayers, and your impact for God, then imitate Elijah and claim the promise of James 5. James, the Lord's half brother. James probably patterned his life of prayer after the Lord and Elijah.

Satan does not mind nearly so much if we witness near as much as he minds if we pray because he knows it is far more important to talk to God about people, than to talk to people about God. It is when we start talking to God about people that our witnessing becomes most effective.

If Satan can keep us off our knees, and keep us running up and down the various mountains of our lives, very little of the Word will really take hold. Instead spiritual pride will develop and the activity will become just busy activity, but ineffective. Prayer is a very important dimension in the life of every believer.

CONCLUSION

Elijah was like us. He was a normal man selected by God for great service because the spirit of Elijah was a spirit of prayer. He prayed earnestly. He also obeyed God, even when the instructions seemed irrational. The results changed the world.

Charles Stanley writes:

Elijah was human, indeed. Instead of further trusting God after He defeated Baal's prophets and brought rain again, Elijah fled when Jezebel grew furious. Elijah would spend forty days in the wilderness and long for death before reaching Mt. Sinai in southern Judah. Despite Elijah's truancy against God, his Father provided for him again. An angel ministered to the rugged prophet with a supernatural supper, showing that God loves us even when we are outside of His will. At Mt. Sinai, God restored Elijah but didn't speak to him in a windstorm, earthquake, or fire. He whispered. Elijah heard a still, small voice, and he began to remember that God was enough.

Shhhh. Listen. How many times did God answer Elijah? Every time.

Elijah is known as a prophet of miracles rather than one of words. But they were God's miracles, not Elijah's. And the same God who delivered Elijah is the same God who transfigured His Son (Matthew 17) in the presence of Elijah and the same God who can transform you today. The key ingredients are the same: God, prayer, and faith.

Too many times we fail to get what God promises because we stop praying," Wiersbe writes. "Elijah was determined and concerned in his praying. 'He prayed earnestly' (James 5:17 niv). The literal Greek reads 'and he prayed in prayer.' Many people do not pray in their prayers. They just lazily say religious words, and their hearts are not in their prayers."

How often is your heart fervently in your prayers? In your wilderness, are you certain your heart is so tethered to God that you can hear Him? He has promised to answer. Shhhh. Listen.... – Charles Stanley, "Believing Elijah" In Touch Ministries, http://www.intouch.org/myintouch/mighty/elijah_77982.html