

‘Elijah - God’s man to a nation in crisis’

Lesson 1 - Introduction

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1KINGS 17:1 KJV “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.”

Elijah - God’s man to a nation in crisis

Tonight, we are beginning a new series about the life and ministry of the prophet, Elijah. Elijah is one of the most colorful and powerful prophets in the history of Israel. But, before we can look at his life, we need to get some background into the time that he ministered.

I. The nation at the time of Elijah

A. Israel’s leaders

1. King - Ahab

Ahab was the seventh king of Israel and the wickedest king of all. He is known for several things.

First, he was known as a great warrior because he had victories over Syria and even pushed the nation’s boundaries to the edge of Damascus.

Second, he was known for his wealth. He built an ivory palace for himself.

1Kings 21:1 KJV “And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.”

Third, he was known for his greed. He had plenty of land and possessions, but it was never enough. He wanted the vineyard of Naboth and would not be satisfied until he had it.

Fourth, he was known for his spoiled child attitude. He acted like a spoiled, pouting child when Naboth refused to sell his

1 Kings 17:1-7 KJV “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. 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. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.”

vineyard to him. Ahab went into his house and lay down on the bed and pouted like a child.

1 Kings 21:4 KJV “And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.”

Fifth, he was known for wickedness and weakness. Ahab was the most wicked king that Israel had ever known. He was wicked because he listened to his wife, Jezebel and allowed her to rule over him.

Sixth, he was known for his wife, Jezebel

2. Queen Jezebel

1 Kings 16:31 KJV “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.”

One of the best descriptions that I read about Jezebel is in the All the Women in the Bible book. It described Jezebel as the “Woman who was a she-devil.” Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Zidonians who was both king and priest of the Baal worshippers.

She was known for her wickedness. She was one of the wickedest women who lived.

She was known for her zealous worship of Baal. She set up to places for the prophets of Baal to stay. One place held 450 and the other 400.

She was known for her persecutions. She was the first female persecutor of those who worshipped Jehovah. She killed the prophets of Jehovah.

She was known for her treachery. She

killed anyone who got in her way. She lied, connived, and used any means necessary to insure that she and her husband got what they wanted.

She was known for her dominating influence over her husband. She ruled over her husband.

She was known for personal adornments. She spent time to paint her face and get ready for Jehu that was coming to have her killed.

B. Israel’s idolatry

Because of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, the nation of Israel had put aside the worship of Jehovah for the idolatrous worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. This idolatrous worship brought the judgment of God on the nation.

Baal Worship: Baal was known as the storm god, the one who brings the rain. In an agricultural society, rain is essential for life and the continuation of the people. These individuals depended on two main things: fertility and harvesting. During this time, people were the most important resource. A family needed children in order to help with the planting and harvesting especially as the parents got older.

The worship of Baal is evil at its very core. Baal would be worshipped with many rituals mostly surrounding human sexuality. The priest and priestess were nothing more than temple prostitutes. They were going through rituals in order to bring favor from the Baal god so the people and the land would be fertile. The worship would involve the sacrificing of an infant, accompanied with sexual orgies to arouse the god to send the rain.

When the rains came, the people praised the idol and when the rains were withheld, they thought the idol was displeased with them.

The basic question in the contest between the prophets of Baal and Elijah on the mountain was, “Who controlled the

rain?"

C. Israel's coming storm

Because of the wickedness and idolatry of the nation, God was sending judgment upon the nation. The judgment was there in order to bring the nation back to the proper worship of Jehovah. God judged in order to restore His people.

God sent a drought and famine in the land. The drought did not last for a few weeks, or even a few months, but for several years. The withholding of the rain for several years showed the divine intervention of God.

James 5:17-18 KJV "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."



There is very little known about Elijah, other than this one verse. He is described as an inhabitant of Tishbi which is an unidentified village in the Gilead area. This is all that we know about his heritage and background.

However, we do not know the area that he came from. The land of Gilead was an area located east of the Jordan and north-east of the Dead Sea. It was a land

of its wickedness, idolatry, and sin

II. Elijah - God's man to a nation in crisis

1Kings 17:1 KJV "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."

A. His heritage

that is rugged and wild. It was a hard land to live in. This area consisted of mountainous slopes and a tableland. Even the name Gilead means raw or rugged.

Elijah was a man of the open country, a rugged man.

B. His ministry

Elijah came on the scene abruptly. Without warning, Elijah appears and goes before the king of Israel and declares the judgment of God on the nation for its sin. There are several occasions when the Lord abruptly

D. Time of Elijah's ministry

- National leaders - wicked, depraved, and forsaken the Word of God
- Nation led into idolatrous worship by its leadership
- Nation killed innocent infants
- Nation turned its back on its founding - Word of God
- Nation is now going to suffer because

sends a person to carry His message to the nation.

Ahijah - 1 Kings 11:29

Jehu - 1 Kings 16:1

Shemaiah - 2 Chronicles 11:2

Azariah - 2 Chronicles 15:1

C. His character

The character of Elijah can be summed up in three words: courage, faith, and zeal.

Elijah was a man of courage. He came right up to King Ahab and told him that God was going to judge Israel. Later, when he returned to King Ahab, he again confronted him and his sin. He confronted all the prophets of Baal on the mount.

1 Kings 18:17-18 KJV "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."

Elijah was a man of faith. He believed in the Lord. He by faith prayed that it would not rain and it did not rain for three and half years. He then prayed for rain and it did rain.

James 5:17-18 KJV "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Elijah was a man of zeal. When Elijah was under the juniper tree, he expressed that he has been very jealous for the Lord when everyone else has turned back. He had zeal to do the will of God in his life.

1 Kings 19:10 KJV "And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD

God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

D. His ministry type

"Old Dr. Kitto remarks, "There were two sorts of prophets: prophets of deeds and prophets of words. Of the latter the greatest is doubtless Isaiah. Of the former there has not been among men a great than Elijah."¹ Elijah's ministry was one of action. He did not spend time in writing as many do, but he spent time doing. He as a prophet of action, which is the type we need today.

His ministry was noted for his miracles. Throughout the Bible, there are three main areas of miracles: Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and Christ.

His ministry was not bringing in something new but rather bringing the nation back to what is right. His ministry was to bring about repentance and return the nation to the worship of Jehovah. He protested the sinfulness of the nation. He protested the idolatrous worship of the nation. He called men back to God.

E. His ministry is not over

Malachi 4:5-6 KJV "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

III. Why study Elijah?

We are living in a time much like this

¹ Explore the Book, J. Sidlow Baxter, p. 112

time of Israel. We have national leaders who are living in sin and wickedness. They are greedy, childish, and will do anything to secure their own selfish desires. Their leadership is leading the nation into sin and away from the foundation this nation was established upon. The nation is killing infants in the form of abortion. The nation is going down a path that will bring the hand of judgment from the Lord. We need men who are willing to be courageous and zealous to call the nation to repentance and to turn back to the Lord.

We need an Elijah for our day!