

“Elijah the Prophet”
1 Kings 17:1
(Preached at Trinity, June 6, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 16** described the growing list of successive kings in the Northern Kingdom. After Rehoboam's foolish actions brought about the division of the kingdom Jeroboam ascended to the throne. His wickedness led Israel into idolatry and became the paradigm of evil for the future kings of Israel. With each successive king evil only increased. When Omri's twelve-year began we read that he won the prize for wickedness. No king before him matched his wickedness.
1 Kings 16:25 NAU - "Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, and acted more wickedly than all who were before him."
2. We would expect that evil had reached its pinnacle and things might improve in Israel. But Omri died and his son Ahab succeeded him. When we are supposing that it couldn't possibly get any worse, we read that Ahab's wickedness exceeded even that of Omri.
1 Kings 16:30 NAU - "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him."
3. Ahab led Israel even deeper into sin and Baal now became the official god of Israel. It appeared that God's Covenant promises and His redeeming purpose had come to an end. Failure filled the air.
Sometimes, evil becomes so intense it would seem there is little hope for recovery. But we must never forget who rules over the universe.
4. After describing the rise of Ahab to the throne and his unparalleled wickedness, Elijah the prophet suddenly bursts on the scene. He stood as a great contrast to Ahab. Ahab was one who had completely turned away from God to worship the Canaanite deity. Elijah's very name was his testimony – "My God is Yahweh." We are told he is from Gilead, but nothing is known of his life prior to his prophetic activities. We don't know his age. Does he have a wife, a family? His background is not the focus. Through Elijah God will affirm His covenant purpose and His judgment upon the rebellious sins of Israel.
5. The Bible holds Elijah as being significant in many ways.
 - A. Elijah stands as the symbol of the prophetic ministry. He stands with Moses at the Transfiguration – Moses representing the Law and Elijah representing the prophets.
 - B. His prophetic ministry was validated by signs and miracles.
Reading the Bible, we might presume that miracles were common daily events. The truth is they were very rare. God used miracles and signs during great turning points in redemptive history. They served to validate Divine revelation.
 - (1) Moses performed miracles in Egypt to validate his calling as the messenger and spokesman of God.

- (2) Now with the arrival of Elijah, God is announcing judgment upon a rebellious people. We'll witness many miracles from Elijah and his protégé, Elisha.
When Elijah healed the widow's dead son she declared,
"Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." (1 Kings 17:24).
- (3) The New Testament was another turning point and the apostles were validated by the miracles that they did by the hand of God.
- (4) And, of course signs and wonders accompanied the earthly ministry of Christ.
- C. Elijah is one of only two that left this world without passing through death. Enoch walked with God until he was taken up. And Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind.
- D. 400 years after Elijah departed Malachi prophesied that God would send Elijah in a spirit of reconciliation to turn back His judgment.
Malachi 4:5-6 NAU - "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. ⁶ "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."
- E. In the NT Jesus interprets John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah would appear before the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom.
Mark 9:12-13 NAU - "And He said to them, "Elijah does first come and restore all things. And *yet* how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? ¹³ "But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him."
6. Elijah arrived on the scene with an announcement of his power to stop rain or bring rain by his word, which of course is the Word of God.
As **Chapter 16** came to a close it would appear that Baal was victorious in Israel. He had his own temple, his own altar and priests and he had the support of the throne.
The author's intent here is to break into the account of Ahab's reign with the great contrasting prophet Elijah who announces God as the only true God.
7. What we are meant to see is the great contrast between the Ahab and Elijah, between Baal and God. It is the great contrast that marks all of humanity. There are the righteous and the wicked.
- I. Elijah was a man of God. Ahab was a man of sin.
- A. Ahab's life is summarized in **Chapter 16**
1 Kings 16:30 NAU - "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him."
1. He reigned for 22 years and yet this is the summary – He was filled with evil.
2. He is among the countless multitudes that Jesus concluded:
Matthew 26:24 NAU - "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."
- B. What a contrast Elijah places before us
1. James declared Elijah as the paradigm for all of the righteous.
James 5:16-17 NAU - "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours"

2. What does James mean that Elijah had a nature like ours?
- The word is ὁμοιοπαθής – literally, of like passions.
Paul used the same word when the pagans at Lystra tried to worship Paul and Barnabas thinking them to be gods.
Acts 14:15 NAU - "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you"
 - On one hand he was a human being like all of us
 - He was a man with all of the weaknesses of man
 - He knew hunger and thirst
 - He understood fear and sadness, even despairing of life.
1 Kings 19:2-4 NAU - "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." ³ And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. ⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."
 - As a man he would have understood the ever-present danger of sin
 - As human beings like Elijah, James wants to encourage us to pray with confidence. If Elijah could pray and stop the rain we too can pray with confidence.
3. But there is something more significant as we consider **Verse 1** of this passage. Who does James have in mind when he made the comparison with Elijah?
- James is speaking to Christians – “My brethren” in **Verse 19**
 - James is writing of the righteous prayer of Elijah
James 5:16-17 NAU - "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours"
 - This is the nature of God’s people. We are holy.
Ephesians 1:4 NAU - "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him"
 - Elijah was not a perfect man, but he was God’s man.
1 Kings 17:1 NAU - "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand"
- C. What an amazing contrast between Elijah and Ahab
- Elijah refers to “the God of Israel.” This was his God before whom he stood in faith and obedience.
 - The implication is Ahab had no such relationship with God.
 - What a blessing it is that like Elijah, we stand before God. Like Elijah, we can call God our God.

- II. Elijah announces God's curse. Ahab defies God's curse.
- A. Everything in **Chapter 16** speaks of rebellion against God's warnings
1. God warned against entering into marriage with the pagans of the land.
 - a. He promised His curses upon those who did not obey.
Deuteronomy 28:15 NAU - "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:"
 - b. But for Ahab, it was a small thing to disregard God's commands.
1 Kings 16:31 NAU - "It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him."
 2. God's warnings against idolatry were clear
Deuteronomy 11:16-17 NAU - "Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. ¹⁷ "Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you."
 - a. Ahab laughed at such warnings. He married the pagan princess Jezebel. He set up a temple for the worship of Baal.
 - b. God threatened shutting up the heavens withholding rain. Ahab had little fear, at least at first.
 3. At the end of **Chapter 16** we read of another curse ignored
Joshua 6:26 NAU - "Cursed before the LORD is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with *the loss of* his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and with *the loss of* his youngest son he shall set up its gates."
As I pointed out last week Hiel most likely began the construction project under the orders of Ahab. Shortly after laying the foundation his first-born died, just as the curse promised. But it did not stop the project. With the conclusion of the project his youngest son died.
 4. Ahab is like all of the kings and people of the earth
Psalms 2:1-3 NAU - "Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"
- C. Elijah bursts on the scene to affirm God's curse.
1. He declared there would be no rain for three years. At first Ahab must have laughed. But a year passed and then two – Ahab must have trembled, yet it wasn't sufficient for him to repent.
 2. Elijah was a preacher of righteousness. He came preaching warnings from God.
 - a. Ahab ignored god's warnings to his peril.
 - b. This is the nature of preaching today. We come preaching the judgment of God upon sin and our great need for God's salvation in Christ. Most people ignore us to their peril.

- III. Elijah trusted in the power of God. Ahab mocked the power of God.
- A. This passage highlights the weakness of all power but God
1. The reign of Ahab was a continuing display of human weakness
 - a. He was surely the king. He had unquestionable power. Jezebel knew this. When he was distraught over his failure to seize Naboth's vineyard Jezebel announced, **1 Ki 21:7** - "Do you now reign over Israel?"
 - b. He had the power to marry Jezebel. He had the power to erect a temple to Baal. He had the power to rule as king. But before God he had NO power.
 2. The Canaanites believed Baal was powerful, that Baal was deserving of worship
 - a. Baal was believed to be the God of the storms, the ruler of the weather, the one who provided rain for the crops. Baal brought success or failure to the crops. The name "Baal" means ruler or master.
 - b. Elijah came announcing that Baal was powerless
- B. Elijah's opening words were, "as the LORD, the God of Israel lives" And then he adds, "before whom I stand"
1. Elijah lived his life continually before the face of God. Ahab lived as if God did not exist.
German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche first coined the phrase, "God is dead." But Nietzsche has taken his place among the multitudes that have learned the truth. God is very much alive and we will all stand before Him.
 2. Elijah came before the drought began. He came while the grass was still green and growing and the crops were yielding their fruit. He came to announce God's coming judgment. The Living God is sovereign over all things.
 - a. This would be a test of the power and vitality of Baal. Elijah announces a drought. Would Baal be able to overpower the curse of God?
 - b. Elijah is announcing that God is the one true Lord of all. God rules over not only weather but life itself. Elijah was about to bring a three-year drought, three years without rain, and Baal would be powerless to stop it.
 - c. God is the living God. Baal is a dead idol. This will be demonstrated clearly in the showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

Conclusion:

1. Elijah was sent forth by God suddenly but at the right time. When it appeared that evil had completely consumed Israel and destroyed God's covenant purpose God demonstrated that He still reigned. God is always working in the background. Ahab will take his place among all who oppose God.
2. God's purposes will stand.
We read in Psalm 2, **Psalm 2:4-6 NAU** - "He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, ⁶ "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."
3. If we keep our eyes fixed upon the daily news it can appear that evil has prevailed upon our land. It is essential that we keep a broad view on God's sovereign purposes. God is continuing to work His good pleasure.
This is the good news of the Gospel. While the world around us seems to be wallowing in sin, God is continuing to save sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ.