

Lecture #18A – Exposition of I Kings

Chapter 17 – Elijah and the Drought

vs. 1-7 – Elijah at Cherith – 915 B.C.

Carroll writes of the impact of Elijah (“my God is Jehovah”)¹:

“Elijah the Tishbite is the most dramatic personage in all history. He has left an ineffaceable impress on the imagination of the men of all times. He appears on the stage of action suddenly, rarely, startlingly, and disappears as suddenly and dramatically for long intervals of time, in which he is completely hidden from public sight. The ordinary life of the man never becomes commonplace because never familiar by association with the people. His successor lived much in a city, and never in seclusion, so that his everyday life was in the full glare of publicity. This intensely dramatic way of appearing, when coupled with his strange garb, stern manners and ascetic life, naturally impresses the imagination. We are not disappointed in the reasonable expectation that such a career would breed many traditions. Long after he passed away we find the Jews continually expecting his return. At the observance of the passover the door is left open that Elijah may enter if he should suddenly come, and a vacant chair is reserved for him at the circumcision of a child. When lost goods are discovered and the owner cannot be found, they are set aside until Elijah comes to identify the owner. In New Testament times, the Jews, unable to account for Jesus of Nazareth, supposed that he was Elijah, and when Christ cried out in the extreme agony of his crucifixion they supposed he was crying for Elijah.”²

Elijah appears “like a meteor suddenly flashing across the darkened sky” and “without genealogy, without historical background, and without warning.”³

His message to Ahab is that there will not be rain until he says so. While the drought takes hold on the land, Elijah is preserved by God at the brook Cherith (“cutting, ravine”)⁴ on the east side of Jordan. Elijah will stay here perhaps a year or more.⁵

Gill writes on about the ravens:

“it seems better to interpret them of ravens, as we do, these creatures delighting to be in solitary places, in valleys, and by brooks; nor need it be any objection that they were unclean creatures by the law, since Elijah did not feed upon them, but was fed by them; and supposing any uncleanness by touch, the ceremonial law might be dispensed with in an extraordinary case, as it sometimes was; though it is very remarkable that such creatures should be employed in this way, which are

¹ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

² An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Divided Kingdom and Restoration Period, by B.H. Carroll. p. 75

³ Israel: From Conquest to Exile by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 386.

⁴ Smith’s Bible Dictionary.

⁵ Gill: “Or “at the end of days”, perhaps a year, which sometimes is the sense of this phrase, see Exodus 13:10”. Reese seems to have him there longer (from 915 to “c. 912.”)

birds of prey, seize on anything they can, live on carrion, and neglect their own young, and yet feed a prophet of the Lord; which shows the power and providence of God in it.”⁶

vs. 8-16 – Elijah at Zarephath

When the brook gave out on its water supply, God guides Elijah to the Phoenician village of Zarephath (“smelting place”)⁷. There he meets an unnamed widow who is preparing a last meal for her son and herself. By acting in faith and preparing for the prophet first, God blessed her by daily providing enough meal and oil for their meals.

vs. 17-24 – Elijah Raises the Widow’s Son from the Dead

Davis writes:

“Her final test was to trust Elijah's God concerning her dead son. It was not ‘to bring her sin to remembrance’ (1 Kings 17:18) that God permitted this to happen (she still clung to the popular superstition that the proximity of a prophet enabled God to see one's sins more clearly - a superstition that has not completely died even in our day!). Rather, God allowed this tragedy to occur in order that He might be glorified through it (cf. John 9:3). Great is the mystery of God's providential purposes! As God's instrument for bringing this boy back to mortal life, Elijah became a true forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ... The widow not only received back her son, but also regain her confidence that her remarkable guest was indeed God’s man.”⁸

Reese notes that this is the first of 10 recorded occasions when someone that was dead was brought back to life.⁹

Chapter 18 – Elijah at Carmel

vs. 1-16 – Obadiah

Obadiah (“servant of the Lord”)¹⁰ is the steward of Ahab’s house. He is in an interesting predicament. He is faithful to God and has worked to undermine Jezebel’s orders to exterminate the prophets by hiding 100 prophets in caves.

⁶ Gill’s Commentary, E-sword module.

⁷ Smith’s Bible Dictionary. In Luke 4:26 it is called Sarepta.

⁸ Israel: From Conquest to Exile by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 387-378

⁹ The Reese Chronological Study Bible, p. 617: “The first of 10 recorded occasions when someone dead was brought back to life (see also 2 Ki 4:35; 13:21; Mt 9:25; 27:52-53; 28:5-7; Lk 7:13-15; Jn 11:43-44; Ac 9:36-42; 20:9-12)”

¹⁰ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

Because of the drought, Ahab worries about his horses (used for military) and mules. He and Obadiah go to search the land for grass to keep these animals alive.

Elijah appears to Obadiah and tells him to tell Ahab that it was time to meet. Obadiah is naturally scared, knowing full well the fury of Ahab. He is afraid that if he tells Ahab that the prophet has reappeared and somehow Elijah disappears again that it will cost him his life. Elijah swears that he is really going to meet with Ahab.

In one of the greatest encounters of all time, Ahab sees Elijah and asks, “Art though he that troubleth Israel?” Elijah responds that it was Ahab and his father’s house that were the cause of the distress because they forsook the Lord and worshipped Baal.

The showdown is to be at Mt. Carmel and Ahab is to bring the 850 prophets of Baal.

vs. 17-40 – Elijah at Mt. Carmel

The contest is set: Baal vs. Jehovah. Two offerings were to be made, one for Baal and one for Jehovah. The test was to see which would send fire to consume the sacrifice.

The prophets of Baal go first. They cry and carry on throughout the day. Elijah even mocks them. As evening approaches, Elijah takes his turn. He builds an altar of twelve stones and digs a trench around it. Water is brought in four containers and poured on the sacrifice, then this process is repeated twice more.

After a short prayer by Elijah – just 63 words in English and 35 in Hebrew¹¹ – fire falls from heaven and the sacrifice is consumed. The people acknowledge that Jehovah is the one true God. The prophets of Baal are killed at the brook Kishon so “that their blood might be poured into that river, and thence conveyed into the sea, and might not defile the holy land.”¹²

By what right did Elijah act? He was simply following the commands of God (Deuteronomy 13:5, 18:20).

vs. 41-46 – Rain Returns

Elijah prays until his servant spots a rain cloud over the Mediterranean Sea. Elijah tells Ahab to get into his chariot and leave before the rain came. Ahab heads for Jezreel as the rain begins to pour. Elijah outruns the horses and arrives there first.

¹¹ Hopefully I counted these correctly.

¹² Matthew Poole’s Commentary. E-Sword module.

Chapter 19 – Elijah’s Flight

vs. 1-8 – Elijah on the Run

When Ahab tells Jezebel about what had happened at Carmel, she immediately seeks to kill Elijah by the next day.

Elijah, the prophet that boldly stood against a king and hundreds of prophets, knew how merciless and evil Jezebel was and ran south for his life. He arrives at Beersheba then goes a days’ journey¹³ further into the wilderness. He sat under a tree and prayed that he may die.

God let him sleep and an angel brings him food and water. Elijah has no other food for the next forty days, mirroring Moses (Exodus 34:28) and Christ (Matthew 4:2). He then travels to Mt. Horeb.

Davis writes:

“Sometimes our service for God is hindered by neglect of the normal needs of the body for proper rest and nourishment: ‘It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of toil; for so he giveth unto his beloved sleep’ (Ps. 127:2). And so Elijah, after the terrific strain of his ministry on Mt. Carmel and his 150-mile marathon race from Jezreel to Beersheba and beyond, needed physical therapy at the hands of a tender angel. Rested, fed, and strengthened by the Lord, he journeyed 200 miles south from the vicinity of Beersheba across the trackless wilderness to the rugged mountain range of Horeb, to Mount Sinai, ‘the Mount of God’ (cf. Exod. 3:1, 12; 4:27; 24:13). In fact, it may be that God led him to ‘the cave’ (19:9, definite in Hebrew) where Moses was covered by God’s ‘hand’ lest he should see God’s ‘face’ (Exod. 33:22). Just as Moses desperately needed God’s encouragement to lead the nation in a time of deep apostasy (Exod. 33:3-6, 15), so Elijah needed the same vision of God in his time of near despair.”¹⁴

vs. 9-18 – Elijah and God

Elijah is discouraged and depressed. He claims to be the only faithful follower of God left in Israel.¹⁵ God sends a great wind, a great earthquake, and a great fire – huge dramatic events! But God was not in those. Instead, He spoke to His prophet in a still small voice.

Davis makes some great observations:

“God’s instruction of the defeated prophet came in four phases.

First, the deep probing of his heart: ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’ (compare God’s question to Adam in Gen. 3:9). Elijah’s answer revealed his keen disappointment and impatience with God’s ways and an exaggerated pessimism concerning the condition of the nation. Why did not God

¹³ Reese says this is about 20 miles.

¹⁴ Israel: From Conquest to Exile by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 396.

¹⁵ Did he forget about Obadiah and the 100 prophets he was hiding?

strike Jezebel dead in his presence and then cause a great host of men to follow his spiritual leadership?

“With the prophet's true attitude fully exposed, Jehovah now graciously showed him by a series of visual aids the drastic limitations of this method of dealing with men and nations. Great winds, earthquakes, and fires can quickly destroy men's lives (as God will demonstrate during the Great Tribulation – Rev. 6-18), but only by the ‘still small voice’ of the Holy Spirit can men be regenerated through the patient teaching of His Word (John 3:3-8; II Tim. 2:23-26).

“Elijah's problem was shared by two of Jesus' own disciples, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. When a Samaritan village refused them hospitality because they were heading toward Jerusalem, James and John desired to consume them with fire from heaven – Elijah-style! But for this they were rebuked by, the Saviour: ‘Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of...’ (Luke 9:55). And this in essence was God's rebuke to Elijah at Horeb.

“This did not mean that judgment and destruction of sinful men had no part in God's program for Israel. God is not only gracious (I Kings 10:12; Exod. 34:6), but righteous (I Kings 19:17; Exod. 34:7). Thus the third phase of his Horeb indoctrination course was that God will judge the wicked – in His own time and way! Hazel, Jehu, and Elisha were each to wield swords, though in very different ways, and Elijah would directly (in the case of Elisha) or indirectly (in the case of Hazael, II Kings 8:8-15; and Jehu, II Kings 9:1-10) launch them into their ministries of judgment.

“The fourth point in God's instruction was this: in spite of outward appearances, God is doing a work in the hearts of men – ‘Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel... which have not bowed unto Baal’ (19:18). So has it ever been from Adam to the present: ‘A remnant according to the election of grace’ (Rom. 11:5). It may come as a shock to those with little understanding of the height of God's holiness and the depth of man's depravity that the remnant of true believers is so small. This was Abraham's problem too, when he assumed that there were probably fifty righteous men in Sodom - or at the very least, ten (Gen. 18:22-33). Our Lord warned us that ‘few there be that find’ eternal life (Matt. 7:14). But in the light of the frightening fact that apart from God's special grace none would be saved (Rom. 3:9-30), it should be a constant source of amazement that the Holy Spirit has transformed so many people (Rev. 7:9), and such unlikely people (I Cor. 1:27-28), and under such unusual circumstances (cf. Phil. 4:22). Zealous to do our part in fulfilling God's great commission to the church, we must also be content with His gracious sovereignty in dealing with the nations.”¹⁶

vs. 19-21 – Enter Elisha

Elijah finds Elisha (“God his salvation”)¹⁷ plowing.¹⁸ Elijah approaches him and casts his mantle on him, a sign of either adoption or calling. Elisha immediately understands and wishes to bid his parents

¹⁶ Israel: From Conquest to Exile by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 396-397

¹⁷ Smith's Bible Dictionary

¹⁸ He is likely a wealthy farmer and has eleven other people plowing with their own teams of oxen. The other explanation is that the ground was extremely hard.

goodbye. This surrender to the call was done in the heart of Elisha without Elijah's influence. Elisha slays his oxen (no turning back now!) and feeds the people around him.

The number of oxen (12 yoke = 24 oxen) is extraordinary. The first solution is that the ground was so hard that it required a great number of oxen to plow, but it seems implausible that so great a number would be used to pull a single plow. The other solution is that there are twelve plows each with their own yoke. This could indicate that Elisha was from a wealthy family. Gill notes that the number twelve could be symbolic of the twelve tribes and Elisha's place as a leader of the nation.¹⁹

Chapter 20 – Ahab Besieged

vs. 1-21 – First Battle Against Syria

Benhadad II²⁰ assembles a coalition of Syrian/Aramean tribes and invaded Israel. He besieges the capital of Samaria and demands tribute of all the wealth and the family of Ahab. At first Ahab concedes to the request, but when a new stipulation comes in that the Syrians will not be satisfied with what would be given to them and would search and take as spoil whatever they wanted then Ahab refuses.

An unnamed prophet tells Ahab that God will deliver the Syrians into his hands if he attacks them. He gathers an army of 7,000²¹. The overconfident Syrians are caught off guard and are driven from the field.

vs. 22-34 – Second Battle Against Syria

The unnamed prophet returns and warns Ahab that the Syrians would return the following year. Benhadad strengthens his kingdom, does away with the tribal kings and takes more power for himself. He prepares a new army to avenge his humiliation.

God intervenes again to show His power and might. Though outnumbered, Israel takes the field and slays 100,000 of the enemy. More fled to the walled city of Aphek²² but are slain when walls collapsed on them.

Benhadad is spared and makes a treaty with Ahab. Part of that treaty is that Ahab will have a strong presence in Damascus, possibly as a buffer from future aggression or maybe to receive tribute.

¹⁹ Gill's Commentary, E-Sword module.

²⁰ This is likely Benhadad II (Hadadezer?), the son of the earlier Benhadad of I Kings 15.

²¹ Is this the 7,000 of 19:18??

²² Which many think is a different Aphek than the one where Israel lost to the Philistines in I Samuel 4.

vs. 35-43 – Ahab Spares Benhadad II

Gaebelein writes:

“Then one of the sons of the prophets (Josephus saith it was Micaiah; 22:8) was commanded by the Lord to ask another prophet to smite him. The prophet refused the unquestioning obedience demanded from a prophet and therefore the judgment of God overtook him. The purpose of God in bringing the judgment message home to Ahab is carried out nevertheless. Then Ahab pronounced his own doom for showing leniency to Ben-hadad.”²³

Chapter 21 – Ahab and Naboth

Note - I cannot encourage you enough to take the time to read, listen to, or watch R.G. Lee’s sermon “Payday Someday”. It can be found easily on the internet in various forms. It is estimated that Lee preached this sermon 1,200 times to over 3 million people. In my opinion, this is the greatest sermon of the 20th century. There is no better retelling of the tale of Naboth’s vineyard and the judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel.

vs. 1-16 – Ahab and Naboth’s Vineyard

Ahab desires to own a vineyard belonging to Naboth (“fruits”)²⁴. The request made is that he would take the land perpetually, violating the Law in Leviticus 25:23 and Numbers 36:7. Naboth refuses and Jezebel plots for Naboth’s death.

vs. 17-24 – Elijah Confronts Ahab

For the crime of Ahab in taking Naboth’s vineyard, God declares that his house would end. In graphic detail Elijah proclaims that the dogs would lick Ahab’s blood and eat the body of Jezebel.

vs. 25-29 – Ahab’s Repentance

Ahab is pronounced to be the worst king yet over Israel. Both he and Solomon sank low because of their marriages to foreign and idolatrous women. Yet Solomon at least had a good start, Ahab started bad and got worse.

²³ Annotated Bible by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

²⁴ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

Often overlooked in the story of Ahab is that he repented of his evil when confronted by Elijah and hearing his doom. God honored that repentance and did not end his house until the days of his son.

Chapter 22 – Ahab, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah

vs. 1-12 – Ahab and the False Prophets

☪ II Chronicles 18:1-12

Ahab seeks an alliance with the Kingdom of Judah and Jehoshaphat. He gathers 400 prophets²⁵ that all say that God will give them victory. One named Zedekiah (“justice of Jehovah”)²⁶ goes so far as to use very dramatic object lessons. Jehoshaphat is not satisfied and seeks another prophet.

It is important to note that the Northern and Southern Kingdoms are not longer openly hostile toward each other, as they had been early after the split. Now they act as allies and have many political ties that bind them together. Their royal houses intertwine with marriages. This does not mean the tribes are united again as they were under Saul, David, and Solomon, but the relationship between them is definitely friendlier.⁷

vs. 13-28 – The Prophecy of Michaiah

☪ II Chronicles 18:13-27

When Michaiah (“who is like God?”)²⁷ arrives. The king is not pleased with his initial answer because he does not say it in the name of the Lord. He reveals that the other prophets were lying because God was setting Ahab up for defeat. Zedekiah mocks him and slaps him. Ahab has the prophet thrown in prison and says he will be released when he is proven wrong, and the king returns safely from battle.

²⁵ Gill speculates that because the numbers match perhaps these are the same as the prophets of Baal from the groves, or at least that same office, as in 18:19.

²⁶ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

²⁷ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

vs. 29-40 – The Death of Ahab

☪ II Chronicles 18:28-34

Ahab disguises himself in the day of battle which was a good tactic since the Syrians were specifically looking for him. It was a “nameless, aimless” Bowman that let fly a fatal arrow that struck Ahab in the back. With Ahab mortally wounded the attack ends and they retreat.

Ahab dies and is buried in Samaria, but in fulfillment of prophecy the dogs licked the blood that was washed from his chariot.

Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah (“sustained by the Lord”).²⁸

vs. 41-50 – The Reign of Jehoshaphat over Judah

☪ II Chronicles 20:30-37

Jehoshaphat was a good king that reigned for 25 years of Judah. He drove the sodomites from the land but did not take away the high places. He brought peace to the tribes of Israel by making a treaty with the Northern kingdom. He controlled the territory of Edom and built ships at the port of Eziongeber. Unfortunately, these ships were destroyed before they could sail.

His son Jehoram²⁹ (“whom Jehovah has exalted”)³⁰ succeeded him.

vs. 51-53 – The Reign of Ahaziah over Israel

The son of Ahab walked in the ways of his forebears and did evil in the sight of the Lord.

²⁸ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

²⁹ Also called Joram.

³⁰ Smith’s Bible Dictionary