

Lesson Three - The Life and Times of Elijah and Elisha  
1 Kings 18

1. The meeting of Elijah and Obadiah. vv. 1-15.
  1. Three and a half years had passed since the ban of Elijah had driven clouds and rain from the sky of Israel, and , and the dry air distilled no dew on the parched and barren ground. (Compare Luke 4 :25; James 5:17).
    1. Surely, if ever, the terrible desolation that the prophet's word had brought upon the land must by this time have had its effect upon Israel.
    2. Unfortunately, the dire circumstances produced no repentance on the part of the king or the people.
    3. What man could do had been attempted, but had miserably failed.
    4. As the effects of the drought become more oppressive, Ahab had searched in vain for Elijah (18:10), while Jezebel had wreaked havoc on all the prophets of Jehovah on whom she could lay hands as if they had been Elijah's accomplices to be punished for what she considered to be his crime (18:4).
      1. Jezebel mistakenly believed that if all the representatives of Jehovah were exterminated, His power could no longer be exercised in the land, and she would both crush resistance to her imperious will and uproot Jehovah's religion that was the charter of Israel's spiritual allegiance and civil liberty.
      2. Yet neither Ahab nor Jezebel succeeded even though Elijah was near at hand either in Ahab's dominion or that of Jezebel's father.
  5. God had a purpose in raising up prophets that Ahab and Jezebel could not defeat.
    1. Such was their number that, however many Jezebel succeeded in slaying, at least a hundred of them could still be hid, by fifties, in the limestone caverns with which the land was burrowed. v. 13.
    2. This was probably in the vicinity of Ahab's palace or Obadiah could scarcely have supplied their needs without being detected.
  6. There was at least one general effect of this drought throughout the country -- everyone must have learned that it followed upon the announcement of Elijah and had some understanding of what it implied concerning Jehovah and his prophet.
    1. Still it is clear that no general repentance had taken place among the people or on the part of the king.
    2. At a minimum, however, they must have been prepared for the grand decisive trial that was soon to occur between Jehovah and Baal.
  7. Still, the weary days crept on as before -- the sun rose and set on a

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cloudless sky over an arid land.

1. It was summer and Jezebel had left the palace of Samaria for her cooler summer residence at Jezreel.
2. Ahab was still in Samaria tending to matters made worse by the condition of the land.
  1. So great was the drought that Ahab was in danger of losing every horse and mule whether for his own service or to support his obligations to alliances. v.5.
  2. To discover if there were any fodder left in the country, Ahab and Obadiah were each to make a careful survey of part of the land. v.6.
  3. Obadiah had not proceeded far on his mission when a sight least expected - perhaps least desired - presented itself. v.7.
    1. It was none other than Elijah who had been directed to leave Zarephath and present himself to Ahab.
    2. The purpose of the mission was that God intended to send rain upon the land. 18:1.
  4. With lowliest reverence Obadiah saluted Elijah, and then received command to announce his presence to Ahab. v. 1.
    1. But timid and only partially enlightened, as God-fearing as Obadiah was, this was no welcome message to him.
    2. Ahab had so long and systematically sought for Elijah that Obadiah could only imagine that the prophet had been miraculously removed from shelter to shelter, just in time to save him from being detected by the messengers of Ahab. v. 10.
    3. In point of fact, we know that such was not the case, but those who have lost the habit of seeing God in the ordinary Providence of everyday life - as is the case with all who are conformed to the world - are too often in the habit of looking for things strange, or for miracles, and thus become at the same time superstitious and unbelieving.
    4. What if, Obadiah argued, when I go to the King you are miraculously removed? v. 12.
      1. Would he not have to pay with his life for Elijah's escape?
      2. Most groundless fears as this are prompted by the faint-heartedness of partially enlightened piety.
      3. Elijah assured Obadiah that this would not happen.

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2. The meeting between Elijah and Ahab. vv. 16-20.
  1. The meeting that followed between Ahab, the representative of institutional power, and Elijah, the representative of Jehovah or spiritual power, was characteristic of each.
  2. Ahab's words were most likely not, as some imagine, an attempt to frighten Elijah by one in authority. v. 17.
    1. Even Ahab could not have imagined that such would be their effect.
    2. In fact, a man like Ahab must have felt it difficult to know how to address Elijah.
    3. It seems rather like an appeal -- see what you've done, and what now?
  3. Whatever their intent, Elijah was not drawn into personal controversy even for a moment.
    1. With a sharp reproof, Elijah pointed out that it was not he but the sin of Ahab and of his house that had brought trouble upon Israel. v. 18.
    2. Elijah directed the king to gather unto Mount Carmel the representatives of all Israel, as well as the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who enjoyed the special favor of the queen. v. 19.
  4. Putting aside for the moment the overruling of God in the matter, it is not difficult to understand why Ahab complied with Elijah's direction.
    1. Naturally, he could not anticipate the turn that matters would take.
    2. Certainly the land was in terrible straits from which, if any one, Elijah alone could deliver it.
    3. A refusal might provoke Elijah to fresh judgments.
    4. What was there to fear from one unarmed man in the presence of a hostile assembly?
    5. If Elijah could remove the drought, it was worth any temporary concession.
3. The Contest at Carmel. vv. 21-38.
  1. That day Carmel witnessed one of the grandest scenes in the history of Israel.
    1. Three such scenes on mountain tops stand out.
      1. Mt. Sinai - God's covenant with Israel made through Moses.
      2. Mt. Carmel - God's covenant with Israel was restored through Elijah.
      3. Mt. of Transfiguration - Moses and Elijah bare worshipful witness to Christ in Whom and by Whom God's covenant was completed, transfigured, and transformed.
    2. In each case the scene on the mountain top formed the high point in the

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life and mission of the agent employed, from which there was a descent, except in the case of Christ, where the descent to Gethsemane was in reality the commencement of the ascent to the right hand of God.

1. Moses died and was buried by the hand of God.
  2. Elijah went up in a chariot of fire.
  3. Jesus died on the cross; his seeming descent was really an ascent to the topmost height of his work and glory.
2. The thematic word in this narrative is "answer" or "respond."
    1. The people will not answer. v. 21.
    2. Elijah proposes two sacrifices with the explanation that the god that "answers by fire, he is God," to which the people "answer" "the word is good." v. 24.
    3. When the priests of Baal call on their god there is no "answer." v. 26, strengthened in v. 29.
    4. When Elijah makes his climactic prayer he cries, "Answer me, Jehovah, answer me." v. 37.
    5. In the final analysis this is not just a contest between Jehovah and Baal as it is a demonstration that Elijah is Jehovah's true, authorized prophet.
    6. The people have doubted that authority, but in the end their witness, worship, and confession show that they accept it. Compare 2 Ki. 1:1-16.
  3. It was a unique gathering that came together on Carmel, bidden to the occasion by Elijah.
    1. Among those that gathered on that day the 400 prophets of Ashare were not found.
    2. They may have wished to avoid the encounter, or they may have felt it was contrary to the wishes of their patroness, Jezebel.
    3. The 450 prophets of Baal were conspicuous by their uniform - white dresses and high pointed caps.
    4. Over against them stood the stern figure of Elijah.
    5. In the foreground was King Ahab.
  4. Elijah did not long leave them in doubt as to the purpose of the gathering.
    1. He turned to the people with words that must have alike shown them their real condition and appealed to their judgment. 18:21. Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15
    1. To Elijah's appeal the people could give no answer.
    2. But the question of Elijah was apt preparation for what was to follow.

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3. The two divided opinions were now to be brought to the test of truth.
  1. The two parties were to measure their strength.
  2. Let Israel see and decide.
2. In the silence that followed his challenge, Elijah stood forward and, pointing to the white-robed crowd of priests over against him, recalled to the king and people that he and he only remained - that is in active office and open profession - a prophet of Jehovah. v. 22.
  1. Single-handed, therefore, he would go to the contest, if a contest of power it was to be.
  2. Let this be the test.
    1. The prophets of Baal on their side, and he on his.
    2. Each would choose a bullock and prepare it for sacrifice, but not kindle the fire beneath.
    3. The God who answers by fire - He shall be God.
  3. Universal assent greeted the proposal. v. 24.
    1. They worshipped as god the powers of nature, thus need not worry.
    2. In the circumstances it was important that the futility of Baal-worship should be exhibited in the fullest manner.
    3. This explains the details that follow.
    4. Additionally, Jehovah's majestic interposition would stand out all the more after the prophets of Baal had spent an entire day applying every resource of their vain superstition.
5. Elijah permitted Baal's prophets to go first, and the scene that followed denies description.
  1. First rose a comparatively moderate, though already wild, cry to Baal, followed by a dance around the altar, beginning with a swinging motion to and fro. v. 26.
  2. The howl then became louder and louder, and the dance more frantic.
  3. They whirled round and round, ran wildly through each other's ranks, always keeping up a circular motion, the head low bent, so that their long disheveled hair swept the ground.
  4. It was now noon and their wild rites had gone on for hours.
  5. With cutting taunts and strong irony Elijah now reminded them that, since Baal was God, the fault must lie with them. v. 27.
    1. He might be otherwise engaged (musing); thus, they must cry more loudly.

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2. Maybe he has gone aside (take care of physical needs).
3. Maybe he is on a journey.
6. Stung to madness, they became more frantic than before. v. 28.
  1. The wild howl passed into piercing demoniacal yells.
  2. In their madness the priests bit their arms and cut themselves with the two-edged swords that they carried and with lances.
  3. As blood began to flow the frenzy reached its highest peak, when first one and then another began to "prophesy," moaning and groaning, bursting into cries, accusing themselves, or speaking to Baal in incoherent broken sentences.
  4. All the while they beat themselves with scourges, cut and mutilated themselves, since the blood of the priests was supposed to be especially propitiatory with Baal.
6. Two more hours the scene lasted, and about that time Elijah began his preparation. v. 30.
  1. Turning from the frantic priests to the astonished people, he bade them draw nigh.
  2. They must gather near not only to be assured that no deception occurred, but also to partake in the preparation.
  3. Elijah restored the altar of Jehovah, demonstrating by the twelve large stones the unity of Israel of old, undivided in national identity and devotion to Jehovah. v. 31.
    1. As he built the altar he consecrated it by prayer. v. 32.
    2. Next, a deep and wide trench was dug around it.
    3. Then the wood, and upon the wood the pieces of the sacrifice were laid. v. 33.
    4. Then water was poured over it the sacrifices until it ran down into the trench, and then the trench itself was filled. vv. 33-35.
    5. Clearly, if there was to be fire it would be an unusual fire.
7. A solemn silence fell on the assembly.
  1. The sun was going down, a globe of fire behind Carmel.
  2. It was the time of the evening sacrifices, but God Himself, not Elijah, would do the miracle.
  3. The hand of the living God must be stretched out.
    1. Once more it was prayer that moved the hand. vv. 36-37.
    2. Elijah's prayer was calm, earnest, majestic, assured, and strong.

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3. Elijah appeared in it only as the servant of Jehovah, and all that he had done was only at Jehovah's word.
4. Jehovah was the covenant-God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, manifesting himself as of old as the Living and True, as Elohim in Israel: the conversion of Israel to Him as their God being the great object sought for.
4. As when the first tabernacle was consecrated (Lev. 9:24), as when King David offered sacrifice upon the threshing floor of Oman after his sin in numbering the people (1 Chron. 21:26), and as when King Solomon brought the first offering into the temple that he had built unto God (2 Chron. 7:1), so now the fire of Jehovah leaped from heaven, consumed the sacrifice and the wood, enwrapped and burnt up the limestone rocks of the altar, and then the with burning tongue lapped up the water that was in the trench.
8. There was another moment of stunned silence, when all who had seen it fell in awe-stricken worship on their faces; then a shout that seemed to rend the very air and found its echo far and wide in the glen and clefts of Carmel: "Jehovah, He the Elohim! Jehovah, He the Elohim.!"
9. Fire from heaven settled the contest; the people fell on their faces settling the controversy.
10. The outcome of the contest.
  1. Repeatedly the Baal prophets had cried to Baal to hear them, but there had been no answer, no voice, no one to take heed
  2. Contrairiwise, one brief, urgent prayer moved Jehovah to action.
  3. Baal may claim to be a god of fire, but he had no fire when it was needed.
  4. It was Jehovah who had fire to leap out to perform his will.
  5. But let us be assured that Jehovah sends his fire not just to subdue Baal and refute Baal's priests, but to confirm his prophet and convince his people.
  6. And the people who had been limping between two opinions found their voices, worshiped and cried, "Jehovah, he is God! Jehovah, he is God."
11. The immediate effects of the outcome of the contest. vv. 39-40.
  1. And so Israel was once more converted to God.
    1. And now, in accordance with the Law (Deut. 13:13 ff; 17:2 ff), stern judgment must be executed on the seducers of God's people -- the idol-priests. v. 40.
      1. The victory that day must be complete.



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2. The renunciation of Baal-worship must be beyond recall.
3. Not one of the priests of Baal must escape.
2. Down the steep mountain sides they hurried them, cast them over precipices, some 1400 feet to the river Kishon below, that was reddened with their blood.
3. But up on the mountain top Ahab was still lingering astonished and speechless.
4. God sends the rain. vv. 41-46.
  1. Elijah heard the sound of wind in the forests of Carmel. v. 41
  2. He had climbed to the topmost height of Carmel out of sight of the king.
  3. None had accompanied him except his servant (tradition says that it was the son of the Widow of Zarephath).
  4. Once more it was agonizing prayer, not once but seven times repeated. vv. 42-44.
    1. At each break the faithful servant climbed the highest knoll and looked earnestly and anxiously over the broad expanse of the sea.
    2. At last it had come, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. v. 44.
    3. But when God hears prayer, He will hear it abundantly; when He gives the blessing it will be without stint.
  5. Ahab must hurry, or the rain will clog the hard ground so that his chariot will have difficulty in making it six miles across the plain to the palace of Jezreel. v. 44.
  6. As the foot of the mountain was reached, the heaven was black with clouds, the wind blew forcefully, and the rain came in torrents. v. 45.
  7. But the hand of the Lord was upon Elijah.
    1. He girded up his loins and ran before the chariot of Ahab.
    2. On such a day he did not hesitate to be the outrunner for the king; he would himself be the harbinger of the news to Jezreel.
    3. Up to the entrance of Jezreel he heralded them; to the very gate of Jezebel's palace he went before them.
    4. But there the two must part company, and the king of Israel must henceforth decide for himself to whom he will cleave, whether to Jehovah or to the god of Jezebel.