

# Elijah

1 Kings 17:1-24 – April 7, 2013

Samaria was the capital of northern Israel. It was once a beautiful city, founded on a large plateau with high steep grades on all sides. The plateau is situated in a broad valley surrounded on all sides by mountains.

So from whatever direction you approached Samaria, you would have to cross over a mountain. Once across the mountain, you would face a broad beautiful valley. In the center of the valley, rising from the valley floor like a volcano, was the large plateau called Samaria.

Northern Israel was economically prosperous. This prosperity could be seen in the homes and fields as you walked through the valley.

It was a long ascent from the valley floor to the city's entrance. Along the way you would pass terraces dotted with splendid houses and palaces.

Samaria was a city of ancient grandeur. Once inside you could see the Temple of Baal. It was built on the western slope by King Ahab, along side his ivory laden palace.

The temple was designed with long graceful monoliths. It was brightly decorated with treasures and gardens.

Eighty years before Ahab's reign many of the faithful believers left the northern kingdom. They sought to get away from the religious perversion brought by King Jeroboam and then promoted by the following four kings.

Once on top of the plateau you could see in panorama view the sweeping valleys. On the west side of Samaria you could see the tops of mountains. Beyond them lay the Mediterranean Sea.

It was a city filled with riches beyond imagination. A city many wanted to live in.

Into this city marched the prophet Elijah.

I can almost imagine the stern face of Elijah as he marched through the streets adorned with pagan prosperity. He was arrayed in a black camel hair robe. It was the clothing only the extreme poor would wear. About his waist he wore a leather girdle, which was the badge of a prophet.

The inhabitance of Samaria must have whispered as he past by. "A new prophet has come from the wilds of Gilead. Let's follow him and hear what he has to say."

As he marched into the temple and palace areas you could see the contrast between the prophet and the city's pagan influence. The priests and prophets of Baal wore effeminate apparel. Their clothing comprised of a long white linen garment with high pointed bonnets. Elijah must have looked like a black dot amid a sea of white robes and colorful royal grandeur.

From the palace porch, Elijah could see the panoramic view of the valley below, and the mountains from which he came.

His message to the king was curt and blunt. No doubt, this was determined by the content.

1 Kings 17:1 - "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

His message was in line with God's promises in Deut. 28:15-18, 23, 24.

"But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: <sup>16</sup> Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. <sup>17</sup> Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. <sup>18</sup> Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep" . . .

"And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. <sup>24</sup> The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed."

The apostasy of Israel had finally reached the breaking point. The king and the people had become openly defiant. King Ahab married a Zidonite, whose father was a Zidonite priest. She advanced the worship of Baal to the point that whatever was left of Judaism in the north was almost gone.

Even the false form of Judaism practiced in the north was now converting to Baal worship. The northern perversion of the Jewish priests was now looking

more like the priests of Baal. They were given entirely over to the Prince of Darkness.

The exterior décor of the city, along with the opulent dress of the priests and people were nothing more than an ornate covering over a rotten and decayed society.

As quickly as Elijah entered the city, he left. He knew he would be eventually hunted. The charge would be high treason against the nation and King.

Even after three years of famine and plenty of time to ponder the cost of departing from God. King Ahab still accused Elijah for bringing the nation to its knees. The king never understood that it was his policies and pagan practices that brought God's wrath upon them.

With Elijah's short prophecy, war was declared. It was the war that would determine Who is All-Powerful and All-Sufficient.

Was it Baal or Jehovah? Was it man's strength or God's power?

This is the same warfare raging today. Who is on the throne? And who do we believe is sufficient to meet all our needs?

There is a vast difference between an intellectual ascent and a real personal belief in God's sufficiency. In reality, King Ahab banked on his personal prowess and when he needed supernatural strength he turned to the occult (Baal worship). This is the realm in which Satan works.

We want our desires met, i.e. a new car, a good job, health, and freedom to do what we want. Yet, what we want and what God wants for us may not match. Rather than seeing God and His will as supreme in our lives and submitting to God, many we seek self-gratification.

King Ahab sold out to immediate wants and a reckless self-willed lifestyle. This is always a temporary arrangement. The god of gold, a good job and doing what you want has its limits.

The whole city of Samaria reflected this pagan attitude: our god Baal is all sufficient. Elijah, and his message from God, challenged the very root of this paganism.

Today's modern slogans reflect the pagan influence in our culture:

- a. Outwit, Outplay, Outlast (Survivor TV)

- b. Save Money, Live Better (Wal-Mart)
- c. I am what I am (Reebok)
- d. When there is no tomorrow (FedEx)
- e. Live in your world, play in ours (Play Station)
- f. The happiest place on earth (Disney World)
- g. For men in charge of change (Fortune Mag)
- h. Pleasure in the path to joy (Haagen-Dazs)
- i. A diamond is forever (DeBeers)
- j. Just do it (Nike)
- k. Success. It's a mind game (TAGhuer)
- l. Make Believe (Sony)
- m. Expand your mind, change your world. (NewStatement)
- n. Make the most of now (Vodafone)
- o. Power, beauty and soul (Aston-Martin)
- p. Have it your way (Burger King)
- q. It's everywhere you want to be (Visa)
- r. Be Stupid (Diesel Jeans)
- s. The last place you want to go (Dixons)

Elijah's message from God challenges the very root of our culture. Only our God is all Mighty and all-powerful and all sufficient.

And now, in one single stroke, He is going to prove it to the people in Elijah's day.

**NO RAIN FOR THREE AND ONE-HALF YEARS**

I'm not sure if you're aware of the full consequences of this message. Even with all the technological advances we possess in our day, we would be brought to our knees.

- a. After one year, many wells would run dry, and we would be buying water at high prices.

Vegetables, Grains, Citrus fruits and much more would be harmed or ruined.

- b. After two years, we would be looking to the ocean to convert salt water into drinking water. However, I doubt that there would be enough conversion to water our crops.

Animals would have been slaughtered, meat prices would sky rocket, and vegetables, grains and fruits would be rare.

- c. By the third year, the economy would be a mess. Our self-sufficiency would be gravely exposed and our weakness and finiteness would be open.

Only God is all-powerful, and sufficient for our needs. Only by God's grace do we have the things we have today. Elijah was sent by God to make this point.

God can provide even in times of severe tribulation.

With northern Israel brought to its knees, everyone living in Elijah's day would experience the ineffectiveness of Baal and the failure of the government to provide. What good is work if there is no rain, no water, and no crops?

Elijah is also a picture of God's all-sufficiency. He was protected from death. Ahab was seeking to kill Elijah yet, God provided for him.

Notice in 1 Kings 17:2-4 - the Word of the God came to Elijah. He was given a place to hide. He was provided a place with food and water. The world was in turmoil. Ahab was turning over every stone to find Elijah. But God kept Elijah safe.

When the rains failed, the people had to tighten their belts. But Elijah sat by the brook Cherith and communed with God and was fed by ravens.

It says in 1 Kings 17:5 that, He (Elijah) went and did according to the word of the Lord.

If we can just grasp the importance of God's word. God has not changed. What He says, He will do. If we would only search the Scriptures and seek to daily apply what they say. But so often we take the route of temporary prosperity.

Again, in 1 Kings 17:6 - God sent the Ravens to show that He is in control of all things. It is wild to even conceive of this event. Ravens are unclean beasts, non-kosher. Yet God used them to feed Elijah.

When the brook dried up - 1 Kings 17:7, God again showed Himself to be all-sufficient. 1 Kings 17:8-9 - God spoke again and moved Elijah to Zaraphath, in the land of Zidon. Remember, Ahab's father-in-law ruled Zidon. This was not the friendliest place to be.

This reminds me of the story of William Levi, a Christian from southern Sudan. To escape Islamic genocide, he was led to flee northward to Khartoum, the capital of northern Sudan and the center of Islam rather than to flee southward to Kenya or Ethiopia. From there he was able to make his way to Egypt, France and to the US. Most of the Christians who headed south were killed or captured. Many who were captured were shipped to other Islamic countries as slaves.

1 Kings 17:9 - the Zidonite widow had no food for herself or her son, yet God sustained her food until the famine past. She was a gentile, not a Jew. She did not have the means to provide, but it was God who met all their needs.

God proves over and over again that He is sufficient. The northern Israelites had to learn the hard way that Baal does not provide.

I think this is the sad part of this narrative. Those who placed their trust in their own prosperity, abilities, goodness or piety will be put to shame.

Proverbs 1:24-26 - "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; <sup>25</sup> But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: <sup>26</sup> I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear "cometh."

This is true for both the believer and unbeliever.

The believer will fall short of the rest that God gives on this earth. It is like the time Israel escaped Egyptian oppression and was led through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Yet many never entered the Promised Land because of unbelief. Yes they were redeemed. They believed God was sufficient enough to deliver them from bondage, yet they failed to trust that God sufficient enough to bring them into the land of Promise.

The unbeliever will never have the blessing of redemption or Promise.

Colossians 2:9-10 “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.  
<sup>10</sup> And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power”

In Jesus is all the Power and Sufficiency of God.