

Elijah—the Lion of the Covenant

1 Kings 17:1; Proverbs 29:25

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Greg L. Price

God raises up men in times of apostasy throughout history to challenge false religion and the rulers that support it. God raised up men like Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Paul, Luther, Knox, Melville, Cameron, Renwick (and many others) who feared offending God more than they feared offending rulers. Such men were great not because of who they were, but rather because of who they trusted and served with all their heart—the great and Most High God.

A great temptation that we all face is the fear of man, the fear of offending man (especially in standing for Christ), and the love of man's approval (Proverbs 29:25; John 12:42-43). Would you rather offend the Lord Almighty to save face with relatives and friends than to stand up boldly in speaking the truth in love? Is it more important to have the good opinion of family, friends, and co-workers than to have a good conscience before your Savior who was not ashamed to bear the curse and humiliation of the cross for undeserving sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began? You must not offend others unnecessarily, but you must realize that Jesus, the gospel, and His holy commandments are offensive to the pride, rebellion, and self-centeredness of sinful man. Man by nature hates any other lord than self over one's life. If you cannot stand now before family and friends for Christ and His truth, how will you ever be able to stand before enemies who can cast you into prison and threaten your life?

Dear ones, God has given the history of such warriors for the Lord, like Elijah, to shame our fear and to encourage us in standing boldly in the power of the resurrected Jesus Christ. We are told, Elijah was a man of like passions with us—having the same nature, feelings, temptations (James 5:17); and yet the Lord used Elijah, and made him as bold as a lion (which the Lord will do for all who struggle with the fear of man). Today we are introduced to Elijah—the lion of the covenant. The main points in the sermon today are: (1) Events Leading Up to the Ministry of Elijah; (2) Meet Elijah—the Lion of the Covenant; (3) Elijah Challenges False Religion in Israel.

I. Events Leading Up to the Ministry of Elijah.

A. In order to understand the importance of Elijah and his ministry, it is necessary to set the historical stage for his entrance in
1 Kings 17:1.

1. After the death of King Solomon (931 B.C.), his son, Rehoboam, came to the throne. When Rehoboam would not promise to lessen the harsh burdens upon the people, Jeroboam revolted and split the unified Davidic kingdom and took with him the ten tribes of Israel, leaving with Rehoboam two tribes in Judah.

a. In order to prevent Israelites in the northern kingdom of Israel from reuniting with those in the southern kingdom of Judah, Jeroboam realized he must keep the people in Israel from going to worship the Lord at the divinely appointed place for worship (the Temple in Jerusalem). Jeroboam devised a plan that introduced all manner of changes contrary to the authorized worship of the Lord—alternate holy days, images of calves to represent Jehovah in Dan and Bethel, a new sanctuary and altar, and a new priesthood. And “this thing became a sin” to the people (1 Kings 12:30). Jeroboam did not introduce a foreign god into the worship of God's people, but simply introduced images and worship that God had not appointed.

b. This was a violation of the Second Commandment (Regulative Principle of Worship). This is in essence what churches do today when they manufacture a worship that is of man's

imagination. It was sin at the time of Jeroboam, and it still is.

2. It became a repeated refrain in the subsequent evil kings that reigned in the northern kingdom of Israel: “And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 15:34).

a. This sinful will-worship (Colossians 2:23) of Jehovah God continued to be practiced in Israel; but when Ahab and his Phoenician wife, Jezebel, came to the throne (some 35 years after the death of Jeroboam), an even greater departure from the truth was introduced into Israel—Baal worship. The true worship of the Lord God of heaven and earth had been greatly corrupted by Jeroboam, but then the next step was to turn Israel to worshipping the false god, Baal.

b. That is exactly how backsliding and apostasy happen in the church, in the family, and in your life. It doesn’t usually happen all at once. It happens by degrees—one step backwards prepares one for the next steps backwards. That is why it is so important, dear ones, that you not consider it insignificant for a church to remove that which is faithful from its Terms of Communion or from its Subordinate Standards. The least change in that which is faithful is preparing that church for future steps that are unfaithful (holy days etc.). The least compromise in your life in justifying a sin or an error is simply preparing you for a further step away from the Lord (lying and deception).

B. And when the true religion is corrupted, it will not be long before the other holy commandments of the Lord are also compromised and then violated without apology. Baal worship and its temple prostitution led to a horrible departure from all manner of biblical morality: violence, murder, and sordid immorality (which naturally also destroyed families).

1. Sounds all too familiar, doesn’t it? In order to understand how our nation now legally justifies the murder of the unborn and the perversion of every form of sexual immorality, simply look to its perversion of biblical Christianity (in the legal toleration and promotion of false religion, blasphemy, establishing this nation upon religious pluralism and polytheism). God has turned this nation over to the evil that it desires. Our only hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ to change hearts and turn to the Lord God.

2. That was the spiritual and moral cesspool in Israel at the time in which Elijah was called by God to testify against Israel’s covenant-breaking before Ahab and Jezebel.

II. Meet Elijah—the Lion of the Covenant.

A. Out of nowhere (it would seem), Elijah is brought forward in the pages of Scripture. We know nothing about his family or life prior to being called to be God’s prophet. All we know is what is stated in 1 Kings 17:1: “And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead.”

1. The words “Tishbite” and “inhabitants” are the same word in Hebrew. Thus, this may be translated, “And Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbi of Gilead.” Though we have no record of the town of Tishbi, we do know that the land of Gilead lay east of the Jordan River where the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh were settled.

2. Elijah must have been raised in a godly home, for the name given to him by his parents means, “Jah (Jehovah) is my God.” This became the very issue at hand as a prophet to Israel, “Who is your God?” Is Baal your God or is Jehovah your God? The name of Elijah loudly proclaimed and testified to all, “Jehovah is my God.” The little word “my” in Elijah’s name must not be overlooked; for it declares not simply that Jehovah is God, but that Jehovah is “my” God. How does Jehovah (the one true living God of the Bible—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) become anyone’s God? Through God’s Covenant of Grace alone. No one has the right or the will or the faith to take the Lord to be his/her God apart first from God’s gracious condescension to rescue underserving sinners who stand condemned before His infinite justice and holiness. Only through Jesus Christ (His sinless life, His substitutionary death, and His glorious resurrection) is there redemption (John 14:6). Only when the Holy Spirit raises one who is dead in trespasses and sins to new life can one trust in Jesus

Christ and then truly declare, “Jehovah is my God” (all Christians then take the name of Elijah). “Elias” is the Greek equivalent of Elijah used most often in the New Testament.

3. Elijah was one of only two people in Scripture that passed into glory without dying, the other being Enoch (Genesis 6:24). Elijah was carried to heaven by a fiery chariot in a great whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). All I can say is that there must have been such a work of God’s grace in the life of Elijah that he was given such an honor by the Lord. When the Lord Jesus was transfigured before His three apostles, who was it that appeared with the Lord Jesus—Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the Prophets)? This was another great honor bestowed upon Elijah. And when the Holy Spirit described the mighty ministry of John the Baptist, to whom was John likened—to Elijah (Luke 1:17)?

B. Elijah was the lion of the covenant who came declaring to Israel her broken covenant with the Lord at Mt. Sinai (1 Kings 19:10).

1. He was a lamb in his own cause but a lion in God’s cause. It was not his own name or his own reputation that he defended, but that of the God of Israel. He was jealous for the name, the reputation, the worship, the covenant, and the commandments of God. He burned with a holy jealousy when he looked around him to see the trampling of God’s holy covenant.

2. We often become incensed when a contract is violated or one’s word is not kept to us, but do you become incensed to behold the gross covenant-breaking with God in sacred covenants like marriage covenants, church covenants, national covenants (Solemn League and Covenant)? Where, dear ones, is our jealousy for our God to be exalted, feared, worshipped, loved, and obeyed within this nation (and especially within the Church of Jesus Christ)? God is calling all of you who declare, “Jehovah is my God” to be a lion of the covenant—not to speak out of your own vengeance or anger toward others. But to speak the truth in love concerning the God you profess to trust, love, and obey.

3. It is time to stop playing games if you call Jehovah your God. It is time to begin with shining the light inside before shining it outside. Change must begin with you and me, if there is to be change in the family, church, and nation. Even evangelism must first and foremost be an expression of our jealousy to see the Lord exalted, glorified, and honored. You are rightly jealous to have the love and affection of your wife or husband, but where is your jealousy that the Lord who created you and redeemed you from the world, the flesh, and the devil be seen in your words and deeds? Do you care? Elijah was jealous for the Lord, and so must all we who call ourselves Christians.

III. Elijah Challenges False Religion in Israel.

A. Baal worship was directly challenged by Elijah when he delivered the prophecy from the Lord to Ahab (1 Kings 17:1). Baal was a Canaanite god that supposedly controlled fertility in agriculture, beasts, and humans. Thus, for Elijah to declare there would be no dew or rain for years (3 ½ years, Luke 4:25) was a straight arrow shot at Baal. Who really controlled agriculture, the rain, the sunshine? This would not be the first time Elijah would challenge Baal worship (Mt. Carmel).

1. This was also precisely the nature of the plagues brought by God through Moses upon Egypt—Jehovah God was challenging the various gods the Egyptians worshipped (the Nile, frogs, locusts, cows, sun, and Pharaoh himself).

2. Dear ones, anchored deep in any religious belief is ultimately who is in control. Every religion believes someone or something is in control. Even humanists, secularists, and atheists believe something is in control otherwise absolute chaos would reign (whether it be fate, chance, or nature). Every person thinks and acts according to this religious principle that someone or something is in control (all people are religious to the core). The question then is who is in control? The Scripture teaches Jehovah God is in control, and He challenges all false religious beliefs by showing it is not man, not fate, not nature, or Satan that is in control. Will you bow before this Sovereign Lord or will you be crushed by Him? Will you serve yourself as

lord or will you serve Almighty God as Lord? That is the message of Elijah to Ahab and Israel.

B. Elijah was a lion in jealously standing for God's covenant for these reasons (1 Kings 17:1).

1. Elijah was a lion for the covenant because he believed that Jehovah was alive ("as the Lord God of Israel liveth"). Jehovah might have seemed dead to Ahab and Jezebel, to the priests of Baal, and to many in Israel, but to Elijah, Jehovah was very much alive. Your actions will follow what you truly believe to be true. Do your daily readings and calling out to the Lord in worship (private and family) show that you believe the Lord God lives? Does your trust in His promises, love for His commandments, separation from worldliness, and desire to obey Him evidence you believe the Lord God lives? Does your willingness to suffer for Christ (to be maligned, mocked, isolated, or persecuted) demonstrate you believe the Lord God lives? Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

2. Elijah was a lion for the covenant because he believed he stood in the presence of God ("before whom I stand"). How near you believe the Lord is to you will also determine how you live--whether a fearful or a courageous Christian life. How near you believe the Lord is to you will also determine how you live—whether a dishonest or an honest Christian life (whether you are all alone or in public). God knows and sees all. Be transparent before Him because He already knows the worst about you, and yet He saved you in love.

3. Elijah was a lion for the covenant because he was a man of prayer (James 5:16-18). He was not a stranger to the Lord in earnest prayer, but was familiar with God. Dear ones, cease from being a lion for your own cause and be a lion for the Cause of Jesus Christ. God is calling you to be a lion for His covenant, to be jealous for your God and His covenant—to be like the greater Elijah, Jesus Christ.

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