



December 16, 2007

Prophets: Elijah

The prophet Elijah lived and served God during a turbulent time in the Northern kingdom of Israel. The nation was almost completely engulfed with idolatry and king Ahab, with his foreign wife Jezebel, had further corrupted the land with their hatred of God and his prophets. Jezebel had killed some of the prophets of God (**1 Kng 18.13**) and stirred up the heart of her husband Ahab to do evil (**1 Kng 21.25**). In one of the most dramatic and well known stories in the Bible, Elijah held a contest with 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of the groves which ate at Jezebel's table, at Mount Carmel (**1 Kng 18.19**). It was here that God demonstrated his power and presence by sending fire from heaven that consumed the sacrifice, the water that had been poured over it, and the stones of the altar (**1 Kng 18.21-40**). As a result of this Jezebel was infuriated and vowed that she would do likewise to Elijah (**1 Kng 19.2**). Receiving this message, Elijah fled from the evil queen (**1 Kng 19.3**). Most folks remember the way in which Elijah was taken up in a flaming chariot (**2 Kng 2.11**) but there is more that we can learn from the life of this great servant of God. When we think of the prophets and the things that they were able to do, we know that they many times were persecuted, as Elijah was, that they were hated and lived in ways that were far from comfortable. What we don't think about is the fact that while they served God, delivered his messages, and were the instruments of demonstrations of God's power, they were also human and had similar fears and things that we have. In the events that were cited above, notice that when Jezebel sent her message that she would kill Elijah, he was overcome with fear and fled for his life. This is interesting because here is a situation where an idolatrous queen's own prophets were destroyed by the power of the true God, whom Elijah served, and she failed to fear, and believed that she had the ability to carry out her threats. Elijah, on the other hand, having been the instrument by which God's power was visibly demonstrated, and who had killed the 450 prophets of baal, was fearful. It goes without

saying that the roles should have been reversed. Certainly we know that Elijah was a man of dedication and faithful service to God, but, he was human as well. Later Elijah asks if God would let him die (**1 Kng 19.4**). Over the course of the remainder of the chapter, God strengthens Elijah and provides information that he is not alone in his service to the Lord. It was revealed to him that there were still 7000 who had not bowed the knees to baal (**1 Kng 19.18**). Following this the Lord blessed Elijah with a helper who would minister to him and later carry on the work of a prophet (**1 Kng 19.15-16**). We, like Elijah, can lose sight of the greatness of God, in spite of knowing how he has blessed us in the past. We may allow ourselves to feel isolated, especially during trial, and think that there is no help or support. Elijah was willing to continue on and do the things that God commanded him to do. He was discouraged, even hid for a time, but he did not ultimately give up. We find that there are times when some are tempted to "take a break" from their service to God because of the things that they face in life. At those times we may not see the blessings that God has provided for us. One of the great blessings that we have is the fellowship of other Christians. I believe that Christ emphasized the aspects of love for his disciples because he knew that they would be facing a hostile world and even knowing that he was with them, they could become discouraged and give up. Paul stated a similar sentiment in recounting his travels and preaching and the things that he faced (**2 Cor 1.8**). Elijah was eventually taken by God and in this we know that no matter how things go in this life there is the promise and hope of deliverance. We will not depart this life in a flaming chariot, but we can rise to meet the Lord in the skies at his return (**1 Thess 4.17**) and go to the home that he has prepared (**John 14.3**). In the meantime we have hope, truth, God and each other.

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