

“Lessons from the Palace”

Introduction

I felt directed to revisit the life of this individual for several reasons.

1. The situation and culture in which he lived is not unlike our own these days.
2. How he related to the culture and evil of his day offers insight for us in our day.
3. He models the need and effectiveness of crying out to God.
4. He knew what it was to live by listening and waiting for God’s direction.
5. He was not a superpower but someone like us who learned to trust God.

As we look to impacting our community for Christ, we need the faith, courage, boldness, prayer and godliness of this powerful prophet of God. The prophet to which I refer is Elijah. Even though Scripture attributes more supernatural acts to Elisha, Elijah is the one that seems to be held in higher esteem. God transported Elijah directly to heaven in a fiery chariot. It was prophesied that the forerunner of the Christ, would come in the spirit of Elijah. Elijah appeared along with Moses and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. James referred to Elijah as a man of effective and fervent prayer that accomplished much. Perhaps one of the two witness who appear at the end times will be Elijah.

I look forward to what God would have us learn along the way in our study of Elijah.

We find the story of Elijah in the book of 2 Kings. This part of the Bible is what we call “narrative literature.” It recounts actual historical events for us to discover the nature of God as He interacts with people. God communicated most of His through story. The best way to study narrative literature is to look for divine truths imbedded in the story. God left a ton of historical material unwritten.

What He did record has some significance for us since...

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Our ultimate goal in this journey is spiritual maturity and equipping for God’s service. Narrative literature invites you to observe the action as a bystander and enter into the emotion and drama of the history. A caution when studying narrative literature is to look for God’s purpose in recording the story and not try copy to or expect to duplicate the action or event. There was only one burning bush that we know. Only Philip was transported to another town. There was only ONE Pentecost. We look for abiding spiritual principles for life and relationship with God.

Historical Background to Elijah’s time

In order to understand the events in Elijah’s day we need to back up a bit to where it all started. It all started with one moldable pagan whom God singled out to be a channel of blessing to the world. His name was Abram later renamed Abraham the father of many nations. From Abraham, God cultivated a special people for His own possession. He blessed them and cultivated them, not because THEY were great, but because HE WAS GREAT. To Abraham was born Isaac, the son of promise, from Sarah’s dried up womb. To Isaac was born Esau and Jacob, latter named Israel. We follow Jacob or Israel, the chosen one, and his family into Egypt where the children of Israel multiply at an accelerated rate to the dark dismay of the Egyptian Empire. The intimidated Egyptians struggled to squelch this fruitful people through hard labor and horrifying infanticide. These terrible tribulations persisted for some 400 long bitter years in spite of repeated desperate cries for help.

Just when the people felt convinced that God no longer cared, He responded to their cries in His perfect time and raised up a leader Moses who miraculously ushered them out of Egypt up to the special land God promised to their father Abraham hundreds of years before. After the death of Moses, God granted possession of the promised land through the leadership of Joshua. After the death of Joshua, leadership fell to individual judges who were raised up to lead the people back into relationship with God and deliverance from the enemies.

Period of the Judges

Due to incomplete obedience and failure to purge the land as God commanded, this fledgling little nation continued to struggle with outside influence and bondage. God graciously responded to their eventual repentance and provided deliverance again and again (Seven cycles of sin and deliverance) through the judges. Due to a fear of what life under the children of Samuel (prophet / judge) would be like, the people cried for a king like the other nations.

United Kingdom

A United Kingdom blossomed and flourished in the land that continued for some 120 years under the reign of three familiar kings, Saul, David and David's son Solomon.

Divided Kingdom

After the death of King Solomon, civil war broke out under Rehoboam. Jeroboam incited a good portion of the Northern tribes to form their own separate kingdom called Israel or the Northern Kingdom. The remaining tribes then became known as the Southern Kingdom or Judah. After 19 evil kings and significant spiritual corruption in spite of numerous pointed prophetic warning and pleading, God disciplined the Northern Kingdom through the brutal Assyrians who conquered and scattered them around 722 BC

Surviving Kingdom

The Southern Kingdom remained forming a period called the "Surviving Kingdom" under the leadership of 20 kings only eight of which followed the Lord to any degree. After a final string of sorry sovereigns and repulsive rebellion by the people, God brought discipline upon Judah through captivity in Babylon.

Exile

Babylon rained destruction on the city and carried off people in several deportations around 586 BC leaving a small group of devastated people. Lamentations 1:1-5

Prophets

It is during these periods that God raised up prophets to continually call the nation back to holiness and obedience. These calls to holiness by the prophets that make up a significant part of the Old Testament. All of the writings of the prophets fit somewhere in the history of kingdom. God used prophets to confront evil even during the United Kingdom period. (Nathan)

During the Divided Kingdom the place of prophets became more prominent. God sent prophets to both the Northern Kingdom Israel and Southern Kingdom Judah. God sent prophets to the Surviving Kingdom.

God sent prophets to the Jews in Exile and when they returned to the land after discipline. The account of the life and times of Elijah the prophet begins in 1 Kings 17. Elijah was God's prophet to the Northern Kingdom.

Introduction to the man Elijah

Even though we know very little concerning the background of Elijah, we embark on a journey with Him as God's special instrument chosen for a specific purpose. We follow him from anonymity and obscurity, into the throne room of a hostile king Ahab and his horrid wife Jezebel. We follow him to isolation and obscurity in wilderness wanderings and wonderings. We observe him move in obedience to the direction of God to the

streets of a remote city where he ministers to an unknown widow. We join the throngs of people at the summit of Mount Carmel to watch him boldly confront the gods of the age. We stand in awe of this man of like passion learning to hear and follow His God. We celebrate a powerful intercessor. And in it all, we come to realize that it is not the power of the man himself but the power of His God willing to use a yielded but frail vessel. We will focus on ten specific scenes in the Biblical record.

1. Lessons from the palace 17:1
2. Lessons by the brook 17:2-7
3. Lessons from Zerephath 17:8-24
4. Lessons on Carmel. 18:1-40
5. Lessons out of Elijah's prayer cave 18:41-46
6. Lessons from Beersheba 19:1-21
7. Lessons in a vineyard 1 Kings 21
8. Lessons on the road 2 King 1
9. Lessons from beyond the Jordan 2 Kings 2
10. Lessons on the Mount of Transfiguration

Most of these periods in Elijah's life follow a definite instruction from the Lord.

"And the word of the Lord came to Elijah"

I. Lessons from the Palace where Elijah boldly announced God's judgment for sin. 1 Kings 17:1

We first encounter Elijah in bold confrontation with the reigning king of Israel.

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." 1 Kings 17:1

This confrontation took place in the capital city of the Northern Kingdom located in Samaria. It identifies the current king as Ahab. The ancestry of Ahab was not all that pretty.

OMRI -- Omri came to the throne in a very odd manner. Zimri, a chariot captain in Israel's army, assassinated King Elah and took control of the palace of Tirzah (1 Kings 16:8-15). Half of the people rebelled and installed Omri ("captain of the host," v. 16) as king. When Zimri realized his situation was hopeless, he burned the palace down upon himself. Omri became king only after successfully opposing another rebellion in the person of Tibni (vv. 21-22). In his reign of eleven years, Omri's greatest accomplishment was to buy the hill of Samaria and build the capital of Israel there. He was succeeded by his son, Ahab. Assyrian sources continued to call Israel, "the land of Omri." Micah accused Jerusalem of following Omri's actions and also his son Ahab's. That was grounds for God's destroying Jerusalem (Mic. 6:16).

AHAB (ay' hab) Personal name meaning, "father's brother." 1. The seventh king of Israel's Northern Kingdom, married a foreigner, Jezebel, and incited God's anger more than any of Israel's previous kings. Ahab, was the son and successor of Omri. His 22-year reign (874-853 B.C.), while enjoying some political and military success, was marred by spiritual compromise and failure (1 Kings 16:30).

His wife, Jezebel, was the daughter of Ethbaal, priest-king of Tyre (1 Kings 16:31). She was a devotee to the Tyrian god Melqart and gave open endorsement to the worship of Baal in Israel by supporting 450 Baal prophets and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah (1 Kings 18:19). Following Ahab's death, she continued to be a significant force in Israel for ten years as queen mother.

Ahab's marriage to a Phoenician princess had both commercial and political benefits. Commercially, it brought desired goods to Samaria and opened the way for expanded sea trade. Politically, it removed any military threat from Phoenicia.

And Omri slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria, and Ahab his son reigned in his place. In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the

LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun. 1 Kings 16:28-34

Ahab and Jezebel promoted the worship of Baal throughout the whole land of Israel. It was so bad, the Phoenician version of Baal worship was considered evil by other pagans. When the Romans encountered Baalism at Carthage, a Phoenician colony, they were utterly grossed out by it. Baal worship glorified every sensual perversion people could conjure up. It was a filthy, perverted, devilish, wicked religion. Children were sacrificed on the altar of Baal. Lewd dancers performed sexual acts. Mattoon

This is the king and culture God sent Elijah to confront.

A. Elijah came from an unknown obscure background

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead...

We know nothing about Elijah's parents and his early years, and we can only speculate regarding his prophetic activity prior to this moment in his life. We can't even pinpoint the place where he was born. Archaeologists have never been able to identify with certainty the location of Tishbe, Elijah's hometown. Gene Getz

The meaning of Elijah's name, "my God is Yah" seems most significant given his daunting task. He came from Tishbe which is thought to be located NE of the Dead Sea near the Brook Cherith yet no one knows for sure. It is said to be a harsh wild country environment. We don't even know what tribe he belonged; perhaps either Gad or Manasseh. We know nothing of his mentors, his schooling, even any account of his initial calling.

The Holy Spirit through the apostle James saw fit to let us know that...

Elijah was a man with passions like ours... James 5:17

We do know that God called him to engage the current culture of corruption. It seems evident that he grew up with a passion for God.

He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." 1 Kings 19:10

God intended us to focus on Elijah's obedience as a spokesman for God in a dark world and so the narrative drops us right in the middle of a confrontation with the powerful and hostile king of Israel, King Ahab and his court.

Possible timeless principle from the Palace #1.

God is more interested in backbone than background.

God is more interested in character than credentials.

God is more interested in submission than schooling.

God is more interested in who you represent matters than where you're from.

Look who he chose to lay the foundation of the church which remains to this very day.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by

His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." 1 Cor. 1:26-31

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. Acts 4:13

In the long run, what matters is our relationship with Jesus. God is not as interested in our background or pedigree as our willingness to boldly serve Him and faithfully follow His direction.

B. Elijah spoke FOR God

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, SAID to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." 1 Kings 17:1

Words are powerful. God could speak directly to people but chooses to use people to speak to people. Sometime they are words of confrontation and caution. Sometimes words of comfort and courage. The New Testament calls every follower of Jesus to be an encourager. That encouragement includes all of the above scenarios.

The overriding factor is that it is spoken in love. God instructs us to season our speech. God commands us not to let any worthless word come out of our mouth but on such words as build others and energize them in their time of need. God leaves us as salt and light in a dark world. God called Elijah to speak words of confrontation concerning sin in the land. Even though we don't find the soon to be familiar phrase, "and the word of the Lord came to Elijah", I am pretty certain that God must have instructed Elijah to personally announce God's judgment to Ahab which is where we first find him.

Possible timeless lesson from the palace #2.

God speaks to and through people.

C. Elijah knew his God.

Where did Elijah draw his courage and boldness to confront Ahab? One must be pretty sure of God's calling to pull off such a bold declaration as Elijah will do. We get a glimpse of the reason for his confidence in Elijah's statement to Ahab

"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives..."

This will be a very common phrase used through the account. Elijah knew the boss. He derived his confidence from His perception of a living and active God. The LORD (Yahweh) the "I AM", the covenant keeping God. The ever-living, ever-present God related by covenant to Israel. Not only that, He understood that he represented the "Almighty" of Israel. He used both names for God just as both names were represented in his very own name "my God is Yah".

Possible timeless lesson from the palace #3.

Know your God

We serve a RISEN Christ. We serve an Infinite God.

D. Elijah knew his standing with God

As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I STAND...

Not only did Elijah know His God but was confident in his current relationship with Him. He spoke as an ambassador, a spokesman, a personal representative of the living Lord, the Almighty and was confident of God's presence with him.

Possible timeless lesson from the palace #4

Know your standing with God.

In God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me? Psalm 56:11

E. Elijah understood and pursued his purpose with boldness.

There will be no dew or rain during these years except by my command!" 1 Kings 17:1

Elijah boldly confronted wicked King Ahab and pronounced a devastating judgment against the whole nation. He declared a coming drought in the land that would commence at Elijah's word. What a brave thing do? Stand in a hostile crowd and pronounce a judgment that involved control of the weather. He announced cessation of the rain that waters the crops that keeps them alive. Elijah knew why he was there. It is not to chit chat with the king or seek personal favor or try to influence the king. He was there to pronounce the consequence for sin. This is not unlike John the Baptist who came in the spirit of Elijah denouncing Herod for taking his brother's wife.

He boldly declared to the king the consequences for worshipping other gods. Elijah's confidence concerning the rain may have come from a specific passage of Scripture.

"Beware, lest your hearts be deceived and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them. 17 "Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you." Deuteronomy 11:16-17

Elijah simply restated what God already declared as a consequence for idolatry.

Possible timeless lesson from the palace #5

Know your purpose in life

As believers, God calls us to give our life to:

- Cultivate deeper relationship with God – love God.
- Pursue meaningful connection with each other – love people.
- Resist evil and restore righteousness – promote godly living.
- Reach and teach people for Jesus – go into all the world.

F. Elijah prayed fervently.

James 5:17 (through the Spirit) adds a significant piece of information not mentioned in Kings. Later in Kings we will read how Elijah persistently prayed for the rain to return. James recorded what he did at the other end.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit. James 5:17-18

Whether this earnest prayer came before or after the announcement is not recorded.

Possible timeless lesson from the palace #6

Earnest prayer is inseparable from all aspects of God's work.

The urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect. James 5:16

There are some important things we observe from our first glimpse of Elijah in action that come with personal implications for each of us.

Lessons from the palace

- God is more interested in backbone than background
- God speaks to and through people
- Know your God
- Know your standing
- Understand and boldly pursue your purpose, your calling.
- Pray earnestly

