

1. ELIJAH A PROPHET OF THE LORD

I Kings 17v1. JAMES 5v16(b)-18

(Reading ch. 16v29 to 17v1 from 'The Message')

Elijah is a Biblical giant. He is a towering figure in the Old Testament, yet only six chapters record a few incidents from his life. His name also figures significantly in the New Testament.

There was a prophetic expectation of the restoration of an Elijah ministry before the coming of the Messiah. (Malachi 4v5) Jesus Himself said that this was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist, although John himself had not claimed this. John even dressed like Elijah (2 Kings 1v8 cf. Mark 1v6) and was a loner, a man of the desert.

Later some thought Jesus might be Elijah because the prophet's ministry had been characterised by astonishing miracles; so when Jesus began to work mighty signs & wonders some began to make the link. (Luke 9v8f;19).

The stories recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures were well known, and were cited by New Testament figures. Jesus antagonised the people of Nazareth by recalling that God sent Elijah to a non Israelite widow in Zarephath during a time of severe famine. (Luke 4v24-30) The apostle Paul quoted Elijah and God's reply to him, to make the point that God has always had a remnant of faithful people chosen by grace. (Romans 11v1-6) As he gives instructions about church elders praying for sick believers James refers to Elijah's prayer of faith concerning rain (James 5v13-18), and comments "Elijah was a man just like us."

Perhaps most astonishing of all, Elijah appears in the New Testament! Nine centuries after he had disappeared in a chariot of fire! On a mountain Jesus was "transfigured" before three of his disciples, and with Jesus were two towering figures from Israel's history, Moses and Elijah.(Luke 9v28-36)

But why are we turning to Elijah's life for this new series? Why spend time on someone who lived almost three thousand years ago? Because God has called us be a prophetic people. Today we will begin to see what this means. .

1. Elijah was God's man.

In Elijah we glimpse the essence of what it means to be prophetic ie. *his life* was a provocation to the world around him. It was *who he was*, before he even opened his mouth, that set him apart as a prophet.

Elijah was God's man. In fact that is precisely what his name means: El=God. Jah = Yahweh (the Lord) "**The Lord is my God**".

Not many carried that kind of name at that time. They were years of unprecedented spiritual crisis in Israel. Ba-al worship had taken the place of

worship of the one true God. "Ba-al" means "master". It began by describing a variety of Canaanite gods, but it came to be especially associated with the god of fertility. Depraved ceremonies accompanied the rituals. Prostitution was part of the package at poles bearing a female Ba-al "Asherah" image. Human sacrifice was often involved, sometimes including children.

How had this come about? It had come through a combination of weakness and wickedness. This really has a relevant ring. We can see the same lethal combination of weakness & wickedness affecting our culture. The majority are passive and compliant while a vocal minority plunge us into more & more darkness.

Malcolm Muggeridge was a broadcaster, but he was also a prophet. He wrote *"Past civilisations have been destroyed by barbarians from outside, but we are doing this job ourselves. Our artists may be safely left to destroy art, our writers to destroy literature, our scholars to destroy scholarship, our moralists to destroy morality, and our clergy to destroy religion. We breed our own barbarians at the public expense."*

Ahab was a weak man and he had married a wicked woman called Jezebel. She was devoted to the cult of Ba-al. Her father was called "Eth-baal" His name says it all. It means "Baal's man".

But Elijah was God's man. "The Lord is my God". So in 17v1 he bursts on the scene in the Royal palace, in the heart of darkness, and declares the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. God's name had not been heard in that palace for a long time. But while thousands lived in fear of Jezebel or had capitulated or were keeping their heads down, Elijah stood up, willing to be counted. He was God's man.

2. Elijah carried God's presence with him.

This is another defining characteristic of a prophet, and it is the secret of his courage.

v1. "Elijah the Tishbite, from among the settlers of Gilead, confronted Ahab: "As surely as GOD lives, the God of Israel before whom I stand.." That is it! Elijah is more aware of standing in the presence of the Living God, the King of Heaven, than standing in the presence of King Ahab or Queen Jezebel. He reasoned it was safer to live in the fear of God than the fear of man.

And implied in his words is something else. It indicates that before he entered this palace, Elijah had stood in the Council of the Lord God Almighty. He had come straight from God's Presence. That's where his courage came from. He came from the presence of God, and he carried God's presence with him.

This is what it means for us to be prophetic. We stand out as distinctively different. We come from God's presence. We carry His presence with us.

3. Elijah had a message from God.

This is the third thing that defines the prophetic. Being able to declare, "This is what God says!"

v1. "Elijah the Tishbite, from among the settlers of Gilead, confronted Ahab: "As surely as GOD lives, the God of Israel before whom I stand in obedient service, the next years are going to see a total drought - not a drop of dew or rain unless I say otherwise."

Elijah the Meteorologist! Where had this weather forecast come from? Elijah had come from the Presence of God where he had evidently heard the voice of God speaking to him. But how could he be sure? Sure enough to stick his head in the lion's den!

Elijah knew he was on solid ground because the word he was commissioned to pass on was in line with what God had said centuries earlier to Moses. (Deuteronomy 11v1-21) This is a principle that holds true still today. Prophecy is to be tested by God's written word.

The withholding of rain was a sign of God's judgement. The land God had given Israel was utterly dependent on rain, just as the people were utterly dependent on God. So God used rain as a sign. Rain would be the sign of God's pleasure & blessing. Drought would be the sign of His displeasure & judgement. Hence Elijah's message: **the next years are going to see a total drought - not a drop of dew or rain unless I say otherwise."**

This was all the more significant in that Ba-al was a weather god. Some sixth century images have Ba-al holding a thunderbolt. So Elijah was throwing the gauntlet down before the royal idol worshippers. "Let's see who really is God!"

So what does this mean for us? Are we to go around wearing strange clothes and giving weather forecasts in Buckingham Palace? No. Instead God wants a prophetic people who carry the word of the Lord with them. One of the great new covenant prophetic promises was that there would come a day when the whole people of God would be prophetic. (Numbers 11v25-29; Joel 2v28-32). This was fulfilled at Pentecost with the outpouring of the Spirit and the birth of the church. (Acts 2v17,18) Now God wants the whole community of believers to be a Prophetic Voice to their nation. We, here in Northumberland, are to be a prophetic presence and a prophetic voice in this County.

But what do we have to say? What message are we carrying? Terry Virgo writes this in his book 'A People Prepared'. *"My conviction is that the prophetic word to pagan Britain today is 'Repent and believe the gospel!' This message is best proclaimed not by an individual prophet, but by a prophetic church living in obedience to God's word."*

John Wilthew. January 2006

