

Fifteen Lessons

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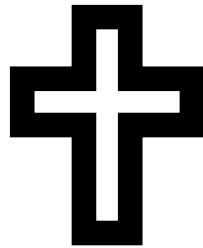
ELIJAH

(I Kings 16-19)

Compiled and Written

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A MAN WITH A MESS – Lesson 1 – Kings 16:29-17:1

Introduction

1. You cannot fully appreciate a person's accomplishment until you understand something of the obstacles he or she has faced to get there.
2. This morning we begin the story of an Old Testament character of tremendous accomplishment. The accomplishments are great in themselves – far above what most people have done. Then as you begin to understand the nature of some of the obstacles he faced, his life takes on a profile nothing short of incredible. Yet, as we shall also note, he was as much human as any of us here.
3. I refer to God's prophet Elijah. In the coming weeks I want to read and tell you his story. We'll examine both the man and his contribution to our common spiritual heritage.
4. The Background – Today we'll focus specifically on four areas of concern that should set the stage for his story. Notice the Parallel in Elijah's day to Our day.

I. THE HISTORY

A. A Distinguished History

1. Israel had a glorious history a thousand years before Christ for about 120 years under the reign of three great monarchs: Saul, David, and Solomon. During those years the chosen nation remained basically faithful to God and because of it, their kingdom prospered. It grew to the fullest extent of its boundaries.
2. By the time of Solomon, Israel had a reputation that went far beyond her borders. The Queen of Sheba verbalized the view of Israel from abroad by saying, 1 Kings 10:7 – *"Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard."*

B. A Declining History

1. When Solomon died however, the kingdom began a steep decline, morally, politically and physically.
2. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, greedy for power and wealth, provoked the people to rebellion. The period called by Bible historians, "The Divided Kingdom," ensued. The ten Northern tribes continued to be called "Israel," the two remaining tribes in the south were referred to as "Judah."
3. Rehoboam had an archrival, Jeroboam, who came to rule the ten northern tribes of the rebellion. He was the first in a line of nineteen wicked kings that ruled Israel before she was finally carried away by Assyrian invaders in 722 BC.

C. A Defined History

1. Israel learned the bitter truth that our nation seems to have forgotten these days – as leaders slide into immoral and unethical behavior, the nation slides as well.
2. An accounting of the nineteen wicked kings of Israel reads like an escalator going down. I don't expect you to remember these names and details, but I do want to bring you into the troubles of the times enough to understand what kind of man this Elijah was.
3. Wickedness gets a foothold. Once evil is allowed and permitted on a basis of tolerance, freedom of expression, rights, and equal time.
4. Once sin gets a "foothold," you can count on its changing its tune about tolerance, equal time, and rights.
5. Tolerance for Communism overtook China; for Evolution overtook Education; for Sex Education overtook our Youth; for Homosexuality overtook our Society.
6. Tolerance for Worldliness has overtook the Church. Churches have softened their message and hardened their music. Churches are encouraged to entertain instead of expose. The result is that Churches have lost their power. Becoming worldlier darkens the Church. Our job is not to make sinners comfortable in their sin.
7. What one generation Tolerates, the next generation will Embrace.

II. THE HEATHEN – 1 Kings 16:23 – *"In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah."*

A. He Angers God – 1 Kings 16:26 – *"For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities."*

1. His Sins – Omri's reign lasted 12 years, but his wickedness was even greater than that of the kings before him.
2. His Son – When he died his son came to the throne – the spineless, gutless Ahab. It was in the days

of Ahab that Elijah lived.

B. He Antagonizes God

1. How would you like the job of being God's prophet in a nation such as Israel during the times I have just described? Definitely not a work for cowards!
2. God needed a Messenger and found him in Elijah. Elijah was a firebrand prophet who feared little but God Himself.

III. THE HERESY – 1 Kings 16:29 – *"And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years."*

A. His Wickedness – Vs. 30 – *"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him." 31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat..."* "Light" means trifling, little, insignificant.

B. His Wife – Vs. 31 – *"...that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him."*

1. The Law of Moses, of course, forbade such marriages. Frankly though, Ahab didn't care. That's the kind of king he was. Insolent, arrogant, he rejected the God of heaven and then put the crowning touch on his rebellion by plunging Israel headlong into the appalling ritual sex orgies of Baal and Asherah, two of the most hideous idols Israel ever linked up with. The worship of these false deities can only be understood fully, however, when you meet Jezebel.
2. Jezebel was the daughter of the king of the Sidonians. Her father, Ethbaal, ruled all of Phoenicia. (Point: The "spirit" of Jezebel is here today.)
 - a. Money was the Motive – To Ethbaal, the marriage of his daughter to the rich Jew Ahab was a great political victory because it set up trade agreements with Palestine. Israel was still quite wealthy in those days. Ahab was able to maintain both a summer and winter home and a special house made of pure ivory.
 - b. Perversion was the Motive – To Jezebel the marriage was much more than a trade agreement. It gave her an opportunity to spread her perverted religion – something she did with the enthusiasm of a zealot.
 - c. She was a worshipper of the Baals and Asherah.
 - (1) Baal was said to be the god of rain and Asherah the goddess of fertility. Worship of these so-called "gods" consisted of ritualized sex orgies and human sacrifice. When the gods needed to be especially appeased even children were offered in the burnt offerings.
 - (2) Women were required to take their turns serving as prostitutes in the temples and were not allowed to leave until they had experienced intercourse in the name of Asherah and given the money collected to the temple treasury. Not only did Jezebel practice the perversions of this religion herself, she pressed it on her husband and the citizens of Israel.
 - (3) We have had this perversion crammed down our throats and God's people have been provoked and pushed to the limit to accept it.
3. The people were oblivious of the danger. The worship of Jehovah had been in decline for 60 years. People had been born and raised who had little or no knowledge of the God of Heaven. Times were ripe for this kind of perversion because it appealed to the raw instincts of the flesh.
4. People often do not detect a decline in public morality because it moves relatively slowly – over the generations. What the grandparents loath, their children tolerate and their grandchildren embrace. That's the way it goes.
5. We're seeing this in our culture today. Things that would have caused riots in the streets 50 years ago are now shamelessly portrayed and encouraged in public entertainment for all ages to see.
 - a. Walt Disney founded a safe place for children to grow and be children. His successor, Ed Eisner, has turned it into a center for perverted sexuality. In Elijah's day it was done in the sacred groves. Today you need only go to Disney World or the movie house. If you miss it there you can surely catch it at the video store or on the Internet.
 - b. We too have a generation being raised without the knowledge of God and they are violent, very violent. Yet no one seems to be able to figure out why. They refuse to take any kind of backward glance at the moral decline that has brought it on. This generation has seen no revival, no real outpouring of the power of God, no real preaching, and no real living.
6. In Israel, in Elijah's day, the people were scattered and anesthetized, sedated, numbed, put to sleep by a succession of wicked kings and ultimately the appearance of Baalism.

C. His Wages – Rom 6:23 – *"For the wages of sin is death..."*

1. Their Defiance – Vs. 34 – *"In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun."*
 - a. People became so ignorant of the Word or developed such a defiance to it, that the city of Jericho was rebuilt in spite of the curse pronounced upon its rebuilding. Josh 6:26 – *"And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."*
 - b. All knowledge or respect for the Word was gone because Israel had gone the downhill slide of sin.
 - (1) Hiel didn't care about the curse and was determined to do what he wanted to do no matter what. God's Word was fulfilled.
 - (2) Hiel laid the foundation at the cost of his firstborn son, Abiram, and the gates of the city at the cost of Segub. You do not defy God's Word and get away with it.

CONCLUSION – God was ready to do something about it – something drastic.

1. He reached out into an obscure group of Nomads and chose a man – a man who, by our standards and those of his day was crude and rough – a man whose voice assaulted the ears and shattered the complacency of people right in the middle of their wickedness.
2. Israel needed a man with heavy artillery to bring her back to her senses so God called Elijah to become one of the most "politically incorrect" prophets of the entire Bible. I want you to shake hands with this man before we go home today, then at a later date we'll look more closely at his story.