

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Can’t Withstand It Anymore?”

First Kings 16:29 – 17:1

1 Kings 16:29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years.

1 Kings 16:30 Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him.

1 Kings 16:31 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him.

1 Kings 16:32 Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.

1 Kings 16:33 And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

1 Kings 16:34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the LORD, which He had spoken through Joshua the son of Nun.

1 Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

Introduction

J.B. Phillips, in his popular translation of the Bible, says,

"Do you remember Elijah? He was a man as human as you are but he prayed earnestly that it should not rain. In fact, not a drop fell on the land for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, the heavens gave the rain and the earth sprouted with vegetation again."

Elijah was "as human as you are..." yet:

1. He could pray and heaven withheld its rain and moisture at his request!
2. He could outrun chariots!
3. He could call down fire from heaven!

He was an ordinary man used by God in extraordinary ways.

The Bible is full of ordinary men and women who were used by God in extraordinary ways. From start to finish, each character you encounter in the Word of God is a living representation of the principle found in Philippians 4:13 that **I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.**

Our Church is full of ordinary men and women. Do you believe that you can be used in extraordinary ways? Elijah was as human as you are; just as ordinary. God used him; **He wants to use you!** As we study the life of Elijah let's pray that we would each and every one of us would come to believe God for the extraordinary.

Elijah's first recorded words reveal the secret of an ordinary man or woman being used of God in extraordinary ways:

1 Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand..."

This phrase, **before whom I stand**, occurs only four times in the NKJV Bible. Elijah says it twice; his disciple and successor, Elisha, says it twice. Their secret was that they stood before the Lord. Standing before the Lord helped them to understand the times in which they were living; and standing before the Lord helped them to withstand the times in which they were living.

#1 Stand Before The Lord
And You Will Understand
The Times In Which You Live

How had Israel fallen into such wickedness? Saul, David, and Solomon, each in their turn, had ruled a unified Hebrew nation for more than 100 years. But when Solomon's son Rehoboam ascended the throne, he foolishly oppressed the people with heavy taxes and conscripted labor, which prompted civil war. The result was a division between the north and the south. The northern ten tribes were known as Israel, while the southern two tribes were known as Judah. This division continues until Israel is defeated by the Assyrians and Judah is sacked by the Babylonians. This period between the split and the Babylonian captivity is called the time of the kings.

A brief survey of the northern kings, leading up to Elijah's appearance before Ahab, will show you the times in which he lived:

Jeroboam - While Rehoboam ruled in Judah, Jeroboam became the first king of Israel. Fearing that his people would visit Jerusalem in the south, he led the people of the north into idolatry:

Nadab - The son of Jeroboam, he continued the idolatry of his father.

Baasha - A paranoid mass-murderer, he killed Nadab, then everyone associated with Jeroboam's dynasty, establishing a twenty-four year reign of evil.

Elah - While in a drunken stupor, this son of Baasha was assassinated by his servant Zimri after two years of ruling Israel:

Zimri - Having murdered the kings and all his house and Baasha's house, Zimri was next to sit on the throne. Zimri ruled for one week before the people begged Omri, the commander of the army, to be their king. He complied and laid siege to Zimri's city; Zimri, in desperation, committed suicide.

Omri - Omri brought stability to the government. He never sought the Lord, though; in fact, he exceeded all his predecessors in evil acts.

- being changed to bring change -
For more than half a century, intrigue, bloodshed, conspiracy, and immorality permeated Israel. During those years, idolatry had slowly spread over the nation and now held it in its grip. The spiritual darkness was terrible - and about to get worse still as Ahab, Omri's son, ascended to the throne.

There are two things to understand about the evil times Elijah lived in: Evil had become *acceptable*, and evil was *accelerating*.

Evil had become acceptable:

1 Kings 16:29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years.

1 Kings 16:30 Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him.

1 Kings 16:31 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshipped him.

The writer's commentary is that Ahab's wickedness, and the evil he promoted, was "a trivial thing." Evil had become acceptable.

You and I live in a time when evil has become acceptable:

Evil was accelerating:

1 Kings 16:32 Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.

1 Kings 16:33 And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

Ahab **did more**. There seemed to be no end in sight to his evil schemes.

The same is true today! Evil was, and is, acceptable; evil was, and is, accelerating. But there was, and is, also an acknowledgment that God was at work:

1 Kings 16:34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the LORD, which He had spoken through Joshua the son of Nun.

Joshua had prophesied,

Joshua 6:26 ... "Cursed be the man before the LORD who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates."

Prophecy was being fulfilled in Elijah's time; prophecy is being fulfilled today:

1. Israel is a nation again, dwelling in her ancient homeland...

2. Jerusalem has become a cup of trembling and a burdensome stone to the nations of the world...
3. Technology is in place for the multiple prophecies of Revelation to be understood, e.g., the mark of the beast...

You can withstand these evil times! God is at work in our time, preparing the world for the return of Jesus Christ. His soon coming to Rapture us is the hope that purifies us and helps us to withstand the acceptable, accelerating evil of these Last Days.

We've still not discussed the secret to understanding and withstanding the times: The secret of standing before the Lord. Let's do that now as we encounter Elijah in Ahab's court.

#2 Stand Before The Lord And You Will Withstand The Times In Which You Live

1 Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

Remember - always keep in mind - that Elijah was "just as human as you are." If you had been alive during Ahab's evil reign, it could have been you walking in to his court to confront him.

Hard to accept... Yet true, nonetheless.

Elijah's only advice to you is to stand before the Lord. There are certain characteristics of a person who is standing before the Lord. You see them as Elijah is described to you.

Study is a characteristic of a person who is standing before the Lord. Elijah studied God's Word. How do you know that he did? He prayed in faith that it would not rain. It was according to God's Word which he had studied. Here is what he might have read, in Leviticus and in Deuteronomy:

Leviticus 26:18 'And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

Leviticus 26:19 I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze.

Deuteronomy 11:16 "Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them,

Deuteronomy 11:17 "lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.

Sure, God sent him with a prophecy. But it was a prophesy consistent with God's Word.

Surrender is a characteristic of a person who is standing before the Lord. Elijah's name means, "Jehovah is my God." Nothing else was competing for Elijah's affections. He had no idols in his life - no persons, no passions, no possessions that could rival his surrender to God and to God's will for his life.

Solitude is a characteristic of a person who is standing before the Lord. Elijah seems to suddenly appear out of nowhere, yet with power and authority. It is a picture for you of the results of solitude - of spending time alone with God. We're not told how old he was when he appeared before Ahab; but his ministry lasts only a few moments - seconds, really. Yet it is powerful!

James tells us what Elijah was doing in his solitude:

James 5:16 ... The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

James 5:17 ...he prayed earnestly ...

James 5:18 And he prayed again...

Simplicity is a characteristic of a person who is standing before the Lord. The region of Gilead, where Elijah lived, was a rugged wilderness. He was familiar and content with a simple lifestyle. He was altogether unencumbered and, therefore, available to the Lord.

Singlemindedness is a characteristic of a person who is standing before the Lord. God had sent him to deliver a message; he did so, speaking only what God told him - no more, no less. He wasn't distracted along the way; he wasn't overcome by the pomp of the palace, or the bustle of the city.

These, then, are the characteristics of a person who stands before the Lord: Study, surrender, solitude, simplicity, and singlemindedness. They are each within your grasp! When they become prominent in your life, you, too, are standing before the Lord. An ordinary believer, you will find yourself being used in extraordinary ways.

If you had been alive in Elijah's time, it could have been you that walked boldly into Ahab's court.

The times you live in are no less evil; there are still Ahab's to confront; God still raises-up His Elijah's.

You are God's "Elijah" in the place where he has put you. You are just as human as he was - just as ordinary; but God is able to use you in ways that are just as extraordinary.

For your part you need only stand before the Lord. Let your life be characterized by study, by surrender, by solitude, by simplicity, and by singlemindedness.

If you stand *before* the Lord you'll find yourself standing *for* the Lord - able to understand and the withstand the times in which you live.

- being changed to bring change -

