



Sermon Text: 1 Kings 16:29-17:1

Sermon Date: February 3, 2019

As we begin a new sermon series on the life of Elijah, it is important for us to grasp the context in which he lived. In a dark period of Israel's history, Elijah appears out of nowhere to stand alone as the representative of Yahweh.

ISRAEL'S ABHORRENT HISTORY

After a brief period of living united under the reigns of three kings, a civil war erupted and the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms—the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. While the southern kingdom of Judah had a handful of godly leaders throughout its history, all of the kings of Israel “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” 19 kings and all of them were wicked! It was to the northern kingdom and its evil kings that Elijah was called to be a prophet.

AHAB'S UNPRECEDENTED AGENDA

As bad as Israel's kings had been, something new and spectacularly sickening occurs with King Ahab. He takes wickedness to a whole new level during his reign. The author of 1 Kings explains that “Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.” Two aspects of his reign summarize his wickedness.

- **Install the gods of Sidon:** While all the previous kings of Israel had followed in King Jeroboam's idolatrous footsteps by compelling the people to worship Yahweh in an idolatrous fashion (violating the 2nd command), King Ahab sees that as child's play. Under the guidance of his wife, Ahab sanctions Baal worship as the religion of Israel. During Ahab's reign the king of God's chosen people was now openly promoting paganism—he was a Canaanite at heart.
- **Erase the God of Israel:** As the quintessential example of Ahab's wickedness, the author declares that Jericho was rebuilt under his administration. For nearly 600 years, Jericho's defenses had lain in ruins as a testimony to God's judgment and grace. And a curse had been placed by God on anyone who sought to rebuild it. Yet, Ahab didn't care. His reign wasn't marked by ignorance of God's Word, but by hardened opposition to it.

ELIJAH'S UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

Without introduction or explanation, Elijah blazes into Israel's history like a meteor. Three things are worth noticing about Elijah's arrival. First, he is **an obscure man**. He is from Tishbe in Gilead, a place completely erased by history. In today's terms, he is from a one stoplight town in middle America, the kind of place that exists solely for the purpose of leaving. Second, he arrives with **a clear message**—there will be no rain or dew in the land. God had promised this would happen if His people broke the covenant, and now Elijah declares that time has come. Third, this is **a divine showdown**. Baal was the god of rain, so to demonstrate His superiority and reclaim the allegiance of His people, God challenges Baal's power where he is supposed to be the most powerful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. As God's chosen people, how is Old Testament Israel different than any nation today (including America)? Why is it important for us to remember the unique role of OT Israel in redemptive history as we seek to apply this series to our lives?
3. In announcing Elijah's arrival without introducing him, the author does not inform us of Elijah's qualifications, background, or expertise. How does the fact that God uses this obscure man from Tishbe encourage you?