

Lessons From the Time of Elijah

In the days of Elijah there was great apostasy in Israel. Ahab, the king, had connected with himself men and women who had departed from the living God, and turned to the service of idols. The king should have been loyal to God, one who by both influence and example would have bound his people to God; but instead of this, he joined with apostates, and led the people into idolatry. Leading men are endowed with great influence for good or evil, and their responsibility is very great. Ahab had used his influence to propagate evil, and Israel sank deeper and deeper into sin.

Elijah was a worshiper of the living God, and his soul was stirred within him as he saw apostasy prevail, and the people of God follow the customs of the nations around them. He was a man of prayer, and he sent up fervent petitions that God would arrest the tide of evil that seemed about to sweep Israel into perdition. God regarded his prayer, and he was commissioned to announce to Israel, in the presence of the king, that God would bring chastisement upon his people. They had dishonored God in the sight of the nations, and as a result, darkness as a thick cloud enveloped them, and abominations accumulated within their borders. In every direction they had reared the temple of idolatry, the altar of profanity, before which prophets and loyal men, servants of the God of heaven, had poured out their blood. Satan swayed his scepter over Israel, and the moral atmosphere was clouded with the smoke of national idolatry.

In this time of great depravity, Elijah made his way to Ahab, the leader of the apostasy. In his presence he reached forth his hand to heaven, and declared, *"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."* In making such an announcement it might seem that Elijah was taking great risk. If dew or rain had come with no command from Elijah, the king would have represented him as a false prophet, and the priests of Baal would have attributed the blessing to a deliverance wrought by their idol, and would have exalted Baal as triumphant over Jehovah.

The judgment threatened was so unexpected, so terrible, so sudden, that Ahab seemed paralyzed, and he did not realize that the prophet had left his presence unrebuked, until the man of God had gone beyond recall. Then the king roused his servants, and called for the man who had declared that heaven was shut up according to his word. But Elijah was not to be found, and neither dew nor rain fell upon the land of Israel for three years and a half.

The object of this affliction was to arouse Israel to a realization of their sin, to bring them to repentance, and turn them to God, that they might honor Jehovah as the only true and living God. After three years and a half of drought, the Lord said to Elijah, *"Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth."* *"And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table."* The king obeys this command as though he were the servant, and Elijah the king. Then Elijah orders them to bring two bullocks, one for the prophets of Baal, and one for himself, and he bids the prophets dress their bullock and put it on the altar, and call upon Baal for fire. He says, *"Call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well."*

The priests of Baal called aloud, and cut themselves, even unto the going down of the sun, but there was no response from their idol; for *"there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the*

people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord." Then he had the people pour on twelve barrels of water. "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

Before the sacrifice, Elijah had said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." After the destruction of the prophets of Baal, Elijah said to Ahab, "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain." After the king's departure, Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; "and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." When he had bidden Ahab go up and eat and drink, did he have an evidence that the showers were about to fall? Did he see the clouds in the heavens? Did he see the rain, or hear the thunder?--No; he spoke these words because the Spirit of the Lord moved upon his mind, and led him to believe that his prayer would be heard. He had done all that was possible to make manifest his faith, and now he began to pray for the outpouring of the abundance of rain.

He "said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times." The servant watched while Elijah prayed. Six times he returned from the watch, saying, There is nothing, no cloud, no sign of rain. But the prophet did not give up in discouragement. He kept reviewing his life, to see where he had failed to honor God, he confessed his sins, and thus continued to afflict his soul before God, while watching for a token that his prayer was answered. As he searched his heart, he seemed to be less and less, both in his own estimation and in the sight of God. It seemed to him that he was nothing, and that God was everything; and when he reached the point of renouncing self, while he clung to the Saviour as his only strength and righteousness, the answer came. The servant appeared, and said, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

There are many lessons to be drawn from the experience of Israel and of the prophet of God. We are living in a time of apostasy similar to the time of which we have read; for there is great religious declension in the churches, among the professed people of God. The children of God should have a realization of their accountability, and should direct their hearts toward God, seeking for strength and grace with an earnestness which they have never before manifested. There never was a more solemn time in the history of the world than the time in which we are now living. Our eternal interests are at stake, and we should arouse to the importance of making our calling and election sure. We dare not risk our eternal interests on mere probabilities. We must be in earnest. What we are, what we are doing, what is to be our course of action in the future, are all questions of untold moment, and we cannot afford to be listless, indifferent, unconcerned. It becomes each one of us to inquire, "What is eternity to me?" Are our feet in the path that leads to heaven, or in the broad road that leads to perdition?

All around us the world is manifesting intense activity. There is a feeling of apprehension among all people; they are looking for some great event, but know not what it is to be. The state of affairs in Europe excites men's fears, and all are looking for those things that shall come upon the earth, and their hearts are failing them for fear. The nations are filled with anxiety, and there is a spirit of unrest and tumult on every hand. If ever there was a time when men should know their position, it is now. No man can afford to go on blindfolded, not knowing in what road he is traveling, but careless and hoping to come out right in the end; for great and disastrous will be his awakening. Those who do not appreciate eternal life enough to work diligently for it, will never obtain it. Those who are seeking earthly pleasure, worldly gain and honor, will never make a success of winning eternal life, unless they repent, and turn to God with all the heart.

How many seek their pleasure in the gaming-table, in attending the theater, while thoughts of God and eternity are put far from their minds! They think more of what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed, than of the salvation of their souls; and can these expect to gain heaven when they neglect the great salvation purchased for them at infinite cost? They give no proof that they love God, no proof that they love the atmosphere of heaven. By the characters they develop they say distinctly that they are in the broad road that leads to ruin.

Those who make a success of the Christian life will count all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Only those who are abiding in Christ, can know what true life is. They realize the value of true religion. They have brought their talents of influence and means and ability to the altar of consecration, seeking only to know and do the will of him who has died to redeem them. They know that the path they must travel is strait and narrow, and that they will have to meet many obstacles and temptations, as they resist the enticements of the broader road that leads to ruin; but they will discern the footsteps of Jesus, and press onward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in their Lord and Saviour. They will choose the royal way that leads to heaven, although it is strait and narrow; for they have respect unto the recompense of the reward.

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