

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, January 19, 2022 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



“Standing Alone in the Gap”
1 Kings 16:29 – 1 Kings 17:1

16²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. 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. ³² Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 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. 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. 17¹ 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.” -1 Kings 16:29-17:1 (NKJV)

No one was more respected, more feared, or more significant to the ancient Jews than those who stood before the people as God’s prophets. When the prophet spoke, the people listened. Their words had impact, like bullets spinning out of a rifle, drilling their way into the heart. Prophets had clout! They weren’t always appreciated, but they were seldom ignored. Let me give you some important characteristics of Old Testament prophets. These will be important as we study the life of Elijah, and will give you the qualities to look for in his life as recorded in Scripture.

Common Characteristics of Prophets in the Old Testament:

- (1) **They were God’s mouthpiece** - Spokes people... mediators
- (2) **They responded to God’s call in faith** - They obeyed

- (3) They were called by God -
- (4) They were given specific tasks to carry out -
- (5) They communicated God's messages with authority - Boldly, courageously, and without fear
- (6) They spoke the truth in all circumstances -
- (7) Their prophecies came true - That is, they were fulfilled
- (8) They never worked for material gain - In other words, they were not paid for their work
- (9) They called people to come back to God - To the covenant way of life
- (10) They pronounced God's punishment, judgement, restoration, and hope -
- (11) They were persecuted for their work -
- (12) They led exemplary lives - They were role models, prayerful, and righteous

And no one can deny that Elijah was one of the greatest of the prophets of Jehovah God. He was God's lightening during the dark days under Ahab and Jezebel's rule. Suddenly he appeared... and almost as mysteriously he disappeared into the sky. But sandwiched between his entrance and his exit, Elijah left an indelible mark etched upon his times.

In no way, however, should we think of him as super-human. James even tell us in **James 5:17**, *"Elijah was a man (fully human like us) with a nature like ours..."* Again and again we'll identify with his humanity, which, hopefully, will encourage us throughout this study of his life and ministry. Let's listen and learn. Elijah's life and times are as relevant to our day and time as they were to his own. Maybe even more so. There is a clear call from God's Word through the life of Elijah to **"Elijah Your Life,"** in other words... make your life like his in our day.

There is no doubt that our world today needs "Elijah-like" believers who will be bold and courageous in standing for right and wrong, who will be filled with love and compassion for the hurts and needs of those around them, who will unashamedly share God's message of the gospel with those who are lost and be bold witnesses in our day. Truly we need to "Elijah" our lives!"

Now before we get into the heart of this introductory lesson on the life of Elijah, let me give you so help on how to apply what you read in God's Word... whether it a character study like this one, or simply as you read and study it's pages. How do you apply the word of God?

Burning Hearts: Applying God's Word to Your Life (*adapted from Skip Heitzig*)

You've read about the importance of the Bible, its impact, history and authority. You understand the value of observing the text and learning to interpret what God is saying through it. But there's one more crucial step to take... namely, applying it... putting your knowledge of God's Word into practice.

After washing His disciples' feet, Jesus asked them, *"Do you know what I have done to you?"* (John 13:12). He wasn't talking about the act itself, but the why behind it... *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet"* (John 13:14).

Application is where the rubber meets the road, where truth moves from the theoretical to the practical. Skip Hertzog said (I love this quote), **"A Bible opened for observation and interpretation without application is simply a decoration."** *What do you think he is saying? Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why? How is this true (or not true)? Cite examples!*

As the Apostle Paul put it, *“Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies”* (1 Corinthians 8:1). We may possibly know those who profess to be Christians that know a lot of facts about the Bible. They may have full heads but empty hearts. In contrast, consider the reaction of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, as they realized Jesus Himself had been opening the Scriptures to them, *“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road?”* (Luke 24:32).

Their passionate response to the insight they had gained turned immediately to action, as they returned to Jerusalem to encourage their fellow believers. Jesus appeared in their midst, *“opening their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:45), and then sending them to preach in His Name *“to all nations”* (Luke 24:47). In order to act, though, you have to understand both the prerequisites for applying the Bible and the practice of appropriating the Bible for your life... how do I get the most out of what I am studying and learning... how do I apply it as I study. This is particularly important as you think about a “character study” from Scripture, like this one. We can take weeks to cite great and fascinating stories and facts about Elijah’s life, but if you can apply it to your life in practical ways so that it make a difference in how God’s uses you and how you live it out unto Him... then the study is meaningless. So let’s look at some practical helps for applying God’s Word to your life... even it is a “character study” from God’s Word.

Practical Helps for Apply God’s Word to Your Life:

(1) **The prerequisites for applying God’s Word (the Bible)** - It is both wonderful and necessary to respond to what you read in the Bible—to submit to its principles and focus on applying its transforming truth. But before you can begin to apply Scripture, you must meet three conditions of the heart.

1. **You Must Be His** - The first, and most obvious, necessity is that you must belong to Christ. Spiritual awakening precedes spiritual appetite. Without a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus, His Word remains closed to you. *“The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Corinthians 2:14). If you don’t know Jesus as Lord and Savior, receive Him right now: admit you’re a sinner and ask Him to forgive you—and then you’ll be ready to start afresh.
2. **You Must Be Hungry** - A healthy newborn has a strong appetite. Once you’re born again, you must develop an appetite for righteousness and truth. As Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled”* (Matthew 5:6). God rewards those who diligently seek after Him, not those who casually snack after Him. To a hungry heart, the Bible becomes the ultimate feast—and the fuel to follow Christ for a lifetime. *“God’s truth often flies in the face of worldly wisdom and cultural momentum. Rather than play lawyer and defend God, let His living Word speak for itself. All you have to do is believe it.”*
3. **You Must Be Humble** - As your spiritual appetite grows, so must your willingness to obey it. A humble submission to the principles it yields is vital. Think of Samuel’s response to God’s call: *“Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening!”* (1 Samuel 3:10). Studying the Bible is energizing when you humbly apply its truth in obedience.

(2) **The practice of appropriating God Word (the Bible)** - God speaks, but you must listen—attentively. Then you must respond boldly. What could God do with you when you listen for His voice with determination and expectation? Consider the acronym B.O.L.D. as an aid in doing so:

1. **B = Believe God's declarations of truth** - God's truth often flies in the face of worldly wisdom and cultural momentum. Rather than play lawyer and defend God, let His living Word speak for itself (Hebrews 4:12). All you have to do is believe it.
2. **O = Obey His commandments** - Look for the timeless core principles within God's commandments, especially when they seem confined to a specific time and place. There is always something to learn, so look for it and then live by it.
3. **L = Learn from examples in Scripture** - The Bible features all aspects of human nature—the good, the bad and the ugly—and you need to learn from all of them. We are flawed vessels, but God is faithful and gracious to teach us what we need to know (1 Corinthians 10:11).
4. **D = Declare God's promises as your own** - Some of God's promises are unconditional, meaning He will do all the work; and others are conditional, meaning if you do what God says, He will bless you, but if you don't, He won't. To call them your own, you have to take God's promises in context and be willing to abide by His conditions.

With these principles in mind, here are some questions I ask myself as I study the Scriptures:

6 Questions to ask yourself as you study Scripture to help you apply it:

1. **How does this passage apply to my life?**
2. **What changes must I make?**
3. **How will I carry out these changes?**
4. **What will be my personal prayer concerning this truth?**
5. **Which verse(s) in this section should I memorize?**
6. **What illustration or word picture will help me remember what I've read?**

Applying God's Word is the step that takes you from student to surgeon. And you have only one patient: yourself. Scripture is the scalpel in your search for sin and weakness in your heart, the cure you plant there to keep you from future sin, and the stitches and salve that close and heal sin's wounds. Ask God as the Master Surgeon to direct your efforts through His Holy Spirit, and trust your concerns and repentance to the healing hand of the Great Physician. The burning heart of application is decisive action. Jesus summed it up: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17).

Some quick facts about Elijah that may help us understand something of his important in Scripture and to our lives...

Quick Facts About The Prophet Elijah:

- (1) **The acts of Elijah are found in 1 Kings 17-22 and 2 Kings 1-2**
- (2) **He became a prophet in Israel after the kingdom divided**
- (3) **He is called Elias in the King James New Testament**

- (4) He is identified as a “Tishbite” (thought to mean that he came from Tishbeh in Gilead)
- (5) He dealt with Israel's king Ahab and his wife Jezebel
- (6) He exposed and killed the prophets of Baal
- (7) He met with God on Mount Horeb, sometimes called Mount Sinai
- (8) He called upon Elisha to follow him
- (9) Like Enoch, Elijah did not die as normal men, but was taken by God into heaven in a whirlwind
- (10) Elijah experienced and performed many extraordinary miracles
- (11) New Testament writers, The Paul and James used him as an illustration in their writings (Romans 11:1-5 and James 5:16-18)
- (12) John the Baptist was likened to Elijah in the New Testament (Malachi 4:5, Matthew 11:12-14, Luke 1:17)
- (13) Elijah actually makes an appearance in the New Testament (along with Moses) when Jesus is transfigured (Matthew 17)

To appreciate the greatness of an individual, his times must be understood. Surrounding culture and philosophies, as well as current political and social events, should all be considered. Elijah emerged on the scene as a unique and rugged man prepared to meet the rigors of his day. Like few others in the world's history, Elijah (God's prophet of fury as some have referred to him) stood alone, answering only to God for his remarkable words and works. From his first appearance until his death, his life commands our attention.



TIMES OF ELIJAH (1 Kings 12-16)

Before the nation of Israel was divided (Israel to the north, Judah to the south), only three monarchs reigned: Saul, David, and Solomon. This period lasted 120 years and was marked by growth and splendor. Upon Solomon's death, decline began both politically and spiritually. His son, greedy for power and wealth, took action which divided his nation. His archrival in the north, Jeroboam 1, became the first of nineteen wicked kings to rule before Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Let's briefly look at each king who ruled in the north from Jeroboam through Ahab, who occupied the throne when the prophet Elijah emerged.

Kings of Israel (the northern kingdom) Leading Up to Elijah's Time:

- (1) **Jeroboam** (1 Kings 13:33-34, 1 Kings 14:19-20, 2 Chronicles 9:29-13:20) – His **22 year reign** extended from approximately **931-910 B.C.** Under his leadership, the northern kingdom got underway. He actively promoted idolatry and ordained priests to serve in the high places (centers of pagan worship). This evil ruler was stricken by God, resulting in death. Deception, murder and idolatry characterized his throne and rule.
- (2) **Nadab** (1 Kings 14:20, 1 Kings 15:25-28) – His **2 year reign** extended from approximately **910-909 B.C.** He also conducted himself and his affairs wickedly in the Lord's sight, walking in the same fashion as his father, Jeroboam. He was killed by his successor.
- (3) **Baasha** (1 Kings 15:28-16:7, 2 Chronicles 16:1-8) – His **24 year reign** extended from **909 – 886 B.C.** Though he was the third king of the northern nation, he was the founder of its second dynasty. Upon occupying office, he murdered everyone in the household of Jeroboam. His actions provoked God and he was eventually assassinated by his own son Elah.
- (4) **Elah** (1 Kings 16:6-14) – His **2 year reign** extended from approximately **886-885 B.C.** While drunk at Tirzah he was murdered by Zimri, commander of half his chariots, who succeeded him.
- (5) **Zimri** (1 Kings 16:9-20) – His was on a **7 day reign** that occurred in **885 B.C.** He took the throne by storm, slaughtering everyone from Baasha's household... including friends and relatives. Israel, upon receiving the news, appointed Omri to be her army commander and king. Omri invaded Tirzah with his countrymen. Realizing the city had been invaded, Zimri set fire to the king's residence and was burned up in the fire along with the structure.
- (6) **Omri** (1 Kings 16:15-28) – His **12 year reign** extended from approximately **885 – 874 B.C.** After ruling six year from Tirzah, he purchased the hill of Samaria and built a new capital from which to rule. In God's sight, his acts of sinfulness surpassed those of his predecessors. At the time of his death, the people turned the throne over to his son Ahab... a huge mistake.
- (7) **Ahab** (1 Kings 16:28-22:40, 2 Chronicles 18:1-34) – His **21 year reign** extended from **874-853 B.C.** To understand his reign, one first must understand his wife Jezebel. Though her father was the king of the Sidonians, he actually ruled all Phoenicia. She was not stranger to politics. Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was unlawful according to the Mosaic Law, but he acted "... as though it has been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam..." (1 Kings 16:31). She brought into this marriage the worship of Baal (the idolatrous deity of the Canaanite pantheon which was believed to control both rain and fertility). Ahab himself took up the service and worship of this pagan god and constructed in Samaria a "house of Baal." The influence of the queen during this reign was greater than that of the king. She was anti-Jehovah in her actions and stopped at nothing to secure her way, even plotting murder. Ahab's sin was more noticeably wicked than all his predecessors... Jeroboam through Omri. **1 Kings 16:33,**

“... Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. ”

NOTE: *It was in the midst of this horrid, decadent regime that Elijah emerged.*

PERSON OF ELIJAH (1 Kings 17:1)

What a startling contrast Elijah was to his idolatrous, evil culture. Consideration of his name, his land, and his style reveals this.

3 Things that Contrast Elijah to the Times in which He Ministered:

- (1) **His name** – The name “Elijah” was a combination of three Hebrew words meaning “My God is Jehovah.” This was a unique title for one who lived in a day when Baal worship was accepted in all quarters. His name spoke of his character, and perhaps may provide a veiled but important detail about his early life. It may be telling us that he was raised in a God fearing and honoring home... perhaps a rarity in his day. **God uses ordinary people with a heart for Him*
- (2) **His land** – He was born around 900 B.C. in the remote and unsophisticated village of Tishbe, located in the country east of the Jordan River. Little is known of Tishbe except that the people were settlers or sojourners of Gilead, both coarse and crude. **God uses ordinary people from obscure places for his purposes*
- (3) **His style** – The prophet was tender toward God, determined to stick with the message given to him by God. He harbored neither hate nor malice as he appeared before an unsympathetic administration to defend his ancestral faith in God. Jehovah to him was a living, vital, fresh reality, and Elijah’s trust was consistent and absolute. **God uses those who are willing to follow HIM fully and exhibit HIS heart and message to men (mercy and truth)*

LESSONS FROM ELIJAH

Today, modern Christianity fails frequently. Why? Because too few Christians are willing to stand alone. Many have blended completely into the world’s scenery. You have to look very closely and talk a long while before you find an individual who will show himself or herself a person of God. In considering Elijah’s life, we can find at least three lessons that can be applied to us and our relationship with God today.

3 Important Lessons to Remember Personally from Elijah’s Life:

- (1) **God looks for a special person in difficult times** – Elijah wasn’t discovered in a seminary. He wasn’t found living in close proximity to King Ahab. God had to dip into Gilead Tishbe, of all places, to find him. There He found a clean, ready-to-use instrument to represent Him. *What does this mean for us?* We may think that God can’t possibly use us, from Buda, Texas...a nowhere place, FBC Buda... an relatively unknown and invisible church. But He can and will, if we let Him! Now think about this... when we say God looks for special people in difficult times... could that mean you? Do you know a “gap” in your sphere of influence? Are you the one God want to stand in the gap?
- (2) **God’s methods are often surprising** – Human logic says, “Use any army to stop Ahab.” Instead, God selected one man, perhaps the least likely for the job. It is true that God often works in surprising and mysterious ways. How is God using you? What are some ways God

would like to use you? Do you feel an unlikely candidate for God's use? Why? How could you be God's "surprise" servant in your home, work, neighborhood, etc.?

- (3) **First and foremost, we stand before and answer to God** – Fear of man and respect for God cannot co-exist. One replaces or nullifies the other. Elijah did not display one ounce of fear before the king and queen when he announced the forthcoming drought.