



# Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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## The World Troubled Elijah

By  
Neil Lopez

In the 1995 Lectureship Book, there was one lesson that was not printed. Brother Neil Lopez had an excellent lesson on **The World Troubled Jonah**. We are printing it in this issue of *The Harvesters* that those who may have purchased the audio tape might have a printed copy as well. Why not place it in the inside cover of the Lectureship Book? It will then be complete. Editor.

The day in which Elijah lived was a dark and difficult and desperate day. The word of God and the will of God had been forsaken. As the record reads in First Kings 18:18, God's men and messages were not heeded. It was a time of the absence of respect for the things pertaining to God and the neglect for the same.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Idolatry was widespread. It had been fifty years or so after the kingdom had been divided. Israel has never recovered from the false system of worship which Jeroboam had set up. And so, half a century of turmoil had preceded this time and battles

were fought and crowns were lost and kingdoms were vanished. The record says that Ahab was on the throne; he had sought an alliance with the King of Sidon and married Jezebel, his daughter. Of the king, the Bible says in First Kings 21:25, "But there was none like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up".

Idolatry, immorality and sin were having a heyday. The Israel of Elijah's day had seen no darker days since she had left Egypt and things had not changed much. Sin is still having a heyday. Sin that slunk down back yard alleys now struts down State Street. Things have not changed. The same world that troubled Elijah then, will trouble you and I today unless you and I eagerly secure and fasten ourselves to the things we have heard. The Hebrew writer says in Hebrews 2:1, "We ought to take the more earnest heed to things which we have heard, lest at anytime you and I should let them slip". I'm convinced that there are so many today who do not deliberately intend on making

hell their home; they just slip and slide and drift into hell.

There are many lessons we can indeed learn from the ministry of the remarkable prophet Elijah.

Let me say further that Elijah's ministry vividly depicts tragedy or triumph, and isn't that where we all live? I have learned that at some point or another every Christian preacher comes to that moment when his ministry is weighed in the balance, wondering if his ministry will be found seriously wanting.

I now want to draw a picture of two or three excerpts of his prophetic career that might be of special concern to you and to me.

According to First Kings 17:5, it was to King Ahab that Elijah came and declared the word from the Lord. Elijah said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be any dew nor rain these years according to my word".

Ahab, don't look now but drought is about to overtake your domain. I think you ought to know, Ahab, that your cisterns are about to be emptied; there

will be no water to irrigate your fields; crops are going to wither; there won't be any grapes on the vine, and the mouths of your people will be parched. My sermon is not very long, Ahab, but I wanted you to know there will be no water for three years.

It was then that God spoke a word to Elijah—Brother prophet, you are in trouble now. Your popularity is gone. You had better go down to the brook at Cherith, and I will send ravens to bring you bread and meat both morning and evening. And not only that, you can drink of the waters of the brook of Cherith.

Now the Book tells us that something happened in the animal kingdom that delayed the ravens from delivering Elijah's dinner. Evidently the funds had been cut off from God's meals on wheels program. Not only that but every day Elijah noticed that the flow of the water in the brook began to decrease. What was once a flowing stream slowed to a trickle, until one morning Elijah went to the water, but the water was no longer there. And thus the question, what do we do when brooks dry up?

We understand why there was no water in the land, because Ahab and Jezebel had gathered themselves an army of false prophets. The drought condition in the physical order was symbolic of the drought which had already taken place in the spiritual order of the nation.

The nation was dry. Whenever there is no God in government, the nation is dry. When there is no spirit in social order, the nation is dry. When godless men pursue godless paths and seek to pervert the purposes, plans and priorities of God, the nation is dry.

We understand the drought of Ahab and Jezebel, but this does not explain Elijah's

situation. Elijah had said what he said because God told him to say it. Elijah was where he was because God told him to go. Don't you find it strange that he who proclaims the drought becomes the victim of the drought? Since God sent Elijah to the brook, why does Elijah's brook dry up? Or to put the question another way, why does the brook dry up for those who are on the Lord's side; for those who sacrifice, serve and strive to follow His way, and proclaim His Word? You see, going to the brook was God's idea in the first place, so why would God sabotage His own program? What do you and I do when the brook dries up? This is a relevant question. Perhaps you have had the experience of seeing your own brook dry up.

Whenever you lose that which gives substance and importance to your life; when that which you rely and depend upon fails to satisfy; when you can no longer find the thing that puts a smile on your face and joy in your soul; when whatever you have invested in fails to give a return; when assets turn into liabilities; when husbands and wives no longer love and relate to each other; when communication has been shut down and shut off; when your child becomes disruptive and disrespectful and tears away every day at every string of your heart; when you come to church Sunday after Sunday and sing the songs and there is no melody in your soul; when prayers become repetitious; when you're enrolled in the university of adversity and can't cut class; even when you are in the right place, doing the right thing, accepting the call and challenge to be God's people; your brook will dry up. Preachers preach, teachers teach, elders

shepherd, when you are where God wants you to be, your brook and my brook will dry up.

What do you and I do? Don't panic; that is anti-God. God is still in control. The Bible states in Psalms 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein".

It will force us to acknowledge who it is that provided the brook in the first place. Sometimes we take so much for granted. It's a dangerous thing to take God's brook for granted. Our brook may be gone tomorrow, maybe today. Whatever the brook is in our lives let us acknowledge that it is not there because we worked for it, we earned it or we deserve it; whatever we have God gave it to us (James 1:17). We learn a lesson here from Elijah. We don't miss the water until the well runs dry. God is in charge and sometimes God has to break us to make us, hurt us to help us, lower us to lift us and close one door for us to look through another.

God was preparing Elijah for the widow in Zarephath. When Elijah's brook dried up, God did not leave him dry. Pack your bags Elijah; it's moving time. Go to the village of Zarephath. There you will find a

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widow. She doesn't have much and there is no employment in town; she's used up all her food stamps; she doesn't have a husband; she has a little boy to take care of; she gathers sticks for firewood, and all she has is a handful of meal and a little cruise of oil. But, if you'll leave the brook over here, I've got a blessing for you over there. Leave the brook on this side, and I'll make you some biscuits on the other side. I have learned that it is so important to be faithful to God in spite of the conditions, in spite of challenge, and because of commitment.

God has chosen us by the gospel. He chose to be our Father and He is interested in you and me. The world may count us out, but God has counted us in and no matter how dark the night is God's grace is generous, provisions are plenteous, mercies are marvelous, strength is stupendous and I started with Jesus and I'm going through even if my brook dries up. Let God be God and let you and I live by faith to God always and forever even unto death. When God says "be faithful unto death" He means always and forever. That is my covenant and constant duty.

To be sure, life is always made up of experiences and encounters that challenge our character and tests our spirits. The greatest wars are not waged in physical struggle, but are fought in the battlefield of the mind. Life's most serious conflict is inner conflict and the scars that inflict the most permanent wounds and cause the greatest pain are to be found not on the skin, but on the soul. To be sure, not only involves experiences and encounters but also questions. Who am I? What am I living for? And when we

consider the ups and downs and trials and tribulations, there is another question that must be asked: How did I get where I am which is so far from where I am supposed to be? Life's encounters and questions seem more relevant when viewed against the backdrop of Elijah's prophetic ministry. He was the prophet—God's mouthpiece—who had troubled Ahab and Jezebel. Their godless reign had brought the nation to an era of immorality and depravity.

God had tried by various means to send Ahab and Jezebel a message; for three years no rain nor dew fell upon the earth. And still, they would not repent. Ahab had been taught a lesson when he tried to acquire Naboth's vineyard, and still he would not repent. Elijah wound up in conflict with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. So powerful was the hand of God, that fire fell down from heaven and burned the prophets' altar and still they would not repent.

It was in light of Ahab and Jezebel's defeat and Elijah's victory that Jezebel sent a word to Elijah. Elijah, you've gone too far now. The same thing you've done to my prophets is the same thing I'm going to do to you. And the fact is, you don't have but twenty four hours to live. It will be tomorrow about the same time and I'm going to take your life and give you a dose of your own medicine.

Now the record says when Elijah heard that his life was in danger, he set out in a hurry to Beersheba, and when he arrived there he left his servant there and went another day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree (I Kings 19:1-10).

We see here a depressed, defeated and

detached Elijah. He was experienced in anguish, anxiety, solitude and internal turmoil. Elijah had come to a point where he had to ask a very difficult question: How did I get where I am which is so far from where I am supposed to be? And I may as well tell you there are only three kinds of people in the world; one's who have just come out, those on their way in and those already in the wilderness. In every life there comes a time for some wilderness duty. And here in the wilderness, God heard a word from Elijah. Elijah sat down under a juniper tree and requested for himself that he die. "It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life..." (I Kings 19:4). He was tired of struggling with the Ahabs and Jezebels, he was weary of wrestling with principalities and powers, he was tired of struggling with forces of iniquity and regiments of unrighteousness; he had almost starved to death, he had to be fed by a raven, he had to beg for biscuits from a widow, he had seen his brook dry up and he had to fight four hundred and fifty prophets alone. Ahab and Jezebel had a contract out on his head and after all the work he had done he was now out in the wilderness all by himself. Enough is enough.

Have you ever been there? You work fifty hours a week and you're still drowning in an ocean of debt. What's the use? I try so hard to be faithful to the Lord's church, yet my life seems to be coming apart. I look into the faces of our young men and see men who are more likely to end up in the state pen than Penn State. The government is as corrupt and crooked as the dope pushers. Among the Lord's people there is a lack of commitment and consecration and there is indifference to error.

### Enough is enough?

When we look closely at Elijah's story, his problem was not Ahab, Jezebel or the social-political order. Elijah's problem was Elijah. And if I am honest in self-evaluation of my life, the trouble with me is me. And if you are honest in the analysis of your life, the trouble with you is you.

Brethren, when God gives you and I an assignment, we best find ourselves doing it whether we are disciples, servants or saints. If a doctor has all the equipment to save a life and refuses to do so, he is charged with malpractice. It is the same with us. Sometimes, we are not serving as sacrificially as we should, not scripturally surrendering as we should, and not steadfastly striving as we should. Just do what God says and leave the success to God.

Now listen to Elijah's real complaint, "Lord I am the only one left" (I Kings 19:10). "Everybody else is gone. Nobody else out here is taking up your course but me, and they are ready to take my life as well". That is why he said enough is enough. He felt he was the only one on whom God could depend. We see depression, detachment, discouragement, defeat and despondency; these are just the symptoms. Sometimes all of us must deal with these same feelings. So what are you and I to do when we are faced with these feelings?

(1) Acknowledge the source. (a) Fatigue-due to past storms. (b) Forgetfulness-look at all God had just brought Elijah through; has not God been good? (c) Fear of failure-that is why he ran. (2) Act on the solutions. (a)

Physical: Elijah had to eat properly and rest properly. (b) Personal: Take a look at yourself. Sometimes it's so easy to play the blame game or pass the buck. (I Kings 19:13). (c) Practical: I Kings 19:15 ff) Get up and do something for somebody else. Anoint Hazael as King over Syria. Anoint Jehu as King over Israel.

God sent Elijah from where he was to where God wanted Elijah to be. God says, I'm going to send you from your place to my place. In your place there is weakness, loneliness, despair and fatigue; but in God's place there is strength, companionship, hope and rest. We don't have to tell God enough is enough.

Elijah, a man driven by divine imperative, is now champion of the down trodden. He represents the crises you and I sometimes face. When we view the dramatic stages of his life; his ups and downs, his elation and depression, his victory and defeats; what lessons can we learn? When we think we have run out of power, God has a way of letting you and I know that in our weakness His strength is made perfect. Every time I overcome an obstacle, God's strength is perfected in me. Every time you subdue a stubborn habit, God's strength is being perfected in you. Every time I resist a temptation, God's strength is being perfected in me. When you and I move the unmoveable, and face the unfaceable, and endure the unendurable, the strength of God is being made perfect in us.

I submit to you in verbiage of scripture (Romans 8:31), "If God be of us, who can be against us"? So, the devil cannot defeat me.

The storms cannot shake me. My burdens cannot beat me. My troubles cannot throw me. And, the world cannot whip me, because greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.

The Bible tells me that He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increases strength. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint (Isa. 40: 29,31).

We learn that when our wells run dry, God is still in charge of the water department. No matter how dark and dismal the night, God is still passing out blessings. Sometimes showers of satisfaction are delayed for more than a season, but God is still in charge of the water of life and God doeth all things well.

We may not have to face four hundred and fifty false prophets, but we will face opposition. We may not have to go down to the brook of Cherith, but our brook may run dry. We may not be physically hungry, but we may become victims of spiritual malnutrition. We may never be ready to give up our life, but we may have to sit under a juniper tree of depression and disappointment.

But thanks be to God, the story ends when Elijah is taken up in a whirlwind. God dispatched a chariot of fire and horses of fire because we see in the story that Elijah was faithful to the end. You and I have that same safety; I can keep the faith. You and I can fight the good fight. You and I can finish the course because someday our change is going to come.

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