

# Faith and Fear

June 11 — 1 Kings 17:8-20:22

## Today In Your Reading...

We witnessed some of the amazing events in the ministry of Elijah the prophet. When we hear the names of men like him, we often conjure up thoughts of undaunted heroes, men who were never afraid to battle the evil of their day; but that would be to ignore the truth. **They were ordinary individuals whom the Lord used to do extraordinary things.** They experienced fear, they lacked confidence, and they were susceptible to the same temptations as other fallible human beings; so it was with Elijah.

After displaying courage at Mt. Carmel, facing down King Ahab and his 450 priests of Baal, and after witnessing an awesome demonstration of God's power, Elijah fled in the face of the frightening threats of Queen Jezebel. Then, after having run away to save his life, he begged the Lord to take his life, to spare him from the danger. These are not the actions of a fearless hero; these are the reactions of a normal man.

I appreciate the fact that the Bible does not hide these raw emotions, that it does not try to make these guys out to be something that they weren't. We could never identify with a man who had no fear, a man who never doubted his inadequacy, a man who didn't struggle with his own sins and shortcomings. When the Bible indicates that Elijah was afraid, we know that he did not face the demons or the darkness in his own power. He had to rely upon the Lord for his strength.

That's why today's passage is so important to both the prophet and to us. While Elijah was hiding in a cave, the Lord was outside displaying His unbridled power in the storm, the earthquake, and the fire. **He was reminding Elijah that he was not alone in the fight, but that he represented the one True God, the Creator and King of the universe.**

Did you notice that Elijah was not the only one who exhibited fear. The widow of Zarephath was fearful that the famine would take her life and the life of her son; but, Elijah challenged her, saying, "Do not be afraid" but to put her trust in the Lord (17:13). Obadiah, a follower of God in King Ahab's palace, was afraid for his life, but **he overcame his fear with faith.**

## Daily Reflection

Can you relate to the widow, to Obadiah, or to Elijah? How so? What fears are you facing?

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**Understand that your spiritual enemy wants you to think that you are alone and that you have no hope in defeating him or his earthly forces.** He will try every way to intimidate you, to bully you, to overwhelm you, and to tear you down with words in order to silence you. Don't listen to the lies that you are alone, that you are a nobody, or that you can't do anything significant. As God raised up 7,000 men and women in Elijah's day, who did not bow the knee to Baal (18:18), so He has raised up warriors around you who will stand with you!

Even though the world might label you a "troublemaker," as it did Elijah (18:17), and even though they may seem to gang up on you, as they did Elijah (450 to one, 18:22), *remember whom you represent.* With the Lord on your side, you cannot fail! With truth on your side, no amount of lies will prevail. **Put your faith in God, the King of the universe, and let that faith overcome your fear!**

# Principles of Liberty

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June 12 — 1 Kings 20:31-22:9; 2 Chronicles 18:1-8

Day 163 — 202 Days to Go

## Today In Your Reading...

King Ahab was the most evil of the kings of Israel, a man who believed that God existed, and who even consulted Him from time to time, but who refused to listen to Him or obey Him. Thus, the Lord sent constant reminders to Ahab of His sovereignty, His purposes, and His expectations, and He kept Ahab accountable for his sins.

The Lord withheld rain in Israel for three years to demonstrate His disapproval of Ahab's worship of Baal. He embarrassed and, then, destroyed the prophets of Baal at an epic showdown at Mt. Carmel. He expressed His disgust to Ahab for letting Ben-Hadad, the enemy king of Aram live after he twice attacked Israel (1 Kings 20:35-43). Finally, the Lord pronounced death for Ahab, Jezebel, and their entire family for the murder of Naboth and for stealing his vineyard (21:20-24).

What is clear here is that **God is sovereign over kings and queens**. Their authority to rule comes from God and, therefore, they are accountable to Him for how they use His authority (Romans 13:1). **Since their authority is delegated (given to them), then it is limited**. They are not free to do whatever they want, but, instead, they must answer to God for their actions, like the rest of us.

In God's sovereignty, He created all people in His image; therefore, *all people are equal and valuable*. Because we are image-bearers of God, then **our life, liberty, and property are valuable and must be respected and protected**. The institution designed by God *to protect these inherent rights* is civil government.

Civil government is a legitimate, God-ordained instrument with prescribed purposes, *the ordering and preservation of society*. In the Apostle Paul's words, it exists "to reward those who do

what is right and to punish those who do what is wrong" (13:3). But here's the catch — **who gets to decide what is right and what is wrong? God does**. Since He is the Creator, the Sovereign, and the origin of all authority, **He gets to decide what is moral and what is immoral, not man, not civil government**.

Therefore, *good government begins with God*, and to be legitimate in its authority, it must enact and enforce *laws that compliment rather than contradict God's laws*. In other words, **there are boundaries that even those in civil government must not cross**. *They exist to protect our rights, not to prohibit them*. If they fail to protect our lives, liberty, or property, as in the case of Ahab, then civil leaders have negated their authority and must be dealt with.

## Daily Reflection

As an American, you have the privilege of living in a country that was founded on these biblical principles. Your forefathers laid them as cornerstones in the *Declaration of Independence* of 1776. They wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and to institute new government..."

**America is exceptional among the nations**. Its exceptionalism is a result of its founding principles, principles of God, of His Word, of Christianity. Thus, *America was founded as a nation under God*. However, as it was with Ahab, if we abandon the Lord and His principles, we will forfeit His blessings and incur His wrath.

# The Battle Is Not Ours Alone

## Today In Your Reading...

We covered several interesting events about which I would like to comment. The first incident was with Micaiah and the 400 prophets of Ahab. While Ahab surrounded himself with false prophets who would support any of the king's actions, Micaiah was the only prophet of God who would tell the truth. "As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "I will say only what the Lord tells me to say" (1 Kings 22:14).

What is interesting here is Micaiah's vision of the Lord in heaven, seeking the advice of His attendants and concocting a scheme to deceive Ahab. Does the Lord ask angels for advice, and does He compel agents to lie on His behalf? The answer to both of these questions is no. We must keep in mind that what Micaiah saw was a vision, not reality. **God is sovereign. He receives counsel from no one** (Eph. 1:11); and, He does not lie or tempt men to lie. However, as we have seen before, such as in the case of Pharaoh, Joseph, and Job, **God does permit evil but uses it for His good purposes.**

A second event that is telling of God's sovereignty was the death of Ahab. It was prophesied to him three times that he would die for his sins. It finally came to pass in a battle against the Arameans. Though Ahab had disguised himself to hide his identity, an archer flung an arrow at random, we are told, and it struck Ahab in a small opening of his armor. The wound was fatal (1 Kings 22:34, 35). **With God, there is no such thing as random arrows; all things proceed as He intends.**

The third event that warrants our attention was King Jehoshaphat's traveling around the country, to encourage the people and their judges to "return to the Lord, the God of their ancestors." He gave them all advice that would be wise for us to follow. "Think carefully before you pro-

nounce judgment. Remember that you do not judge to please people but to please the Lord. Fear Him and judge with care, for the Lord does not tolerate perverted justice, partiality, or the taking of bribes... Take courage and fulfill your duties and may the Lord be with those who do what is right" (2 Chronicles 19:1-11). The Lord cares about integrity and justice. Shouldn't we?

Finally, we read of Judah's war with three nations (20:1-30). I admire the fact that Jehoshaphat's first response was to pray. "He was alarmed by this news and sought the Lord for guidance" (v.3). When he gathered the people at the Temple, he cried out to God for help. I have uttered his closing words many times, **"O God, I am powerless against this enemy that is attacking me. I do not know what to do, so I am looking to You for help"** (v.12). Like Jehoshaphat, I have found the Lord to be faithful to fight the enemy on my behalf. Like the King and the people, I've sung their song, "Give thanks to the Lord for His faithful love endures forever" (v.21).

## Daily Reflection

God is sovereign over all things, including your life. How have you witnessed His sovereignty?

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Have you ever found yourself powerless against the enemy? Did you turn to the Lord for help?

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# Grace to the Humble

## Today In Your Reading...

We picked up with the events after King Ahab's death. The crown of Israel went to his son Ahaziah, yet another wicked ruler who rejected God and bowed to Baal. After his short reign, his brother Joram took over. It was Joram who joined with Jehoshaphat, the godly king of Judah, to invade the land of Moab. During their campaign, God miraculously provided water in the middle of the desert. However, their invasion ended when they witnessed the King of Moab sacrifice his oldest son to his god. This unthinkable event provides some insight into why the Lord despised the surrounding nations.

The event that jumped off of the pages for me today was that of the confrontation between the prophet Elijah and the soldiers of King Ahaziah (2 Kings 1). Ahaziah had fallen through one of the floors in his palace and hurt himself badly. Instead of turning to the Lord for help, he sent his messenger to pray at the temple of Baal. Elijah intercepted the messenger and told him that Ahaziah would not recover from his injuries. This news angered the king, of course, so he demanded that Elijah be arrested. Here is where the epic showdown took place.

Twice, army captains with fifty men found Elijah on a hill and shouted to him, "Man of God, the king has commanded you to come along with us!" Both times, Elijah responded, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and destroy you!" Both times the men were consumed with fire. The third captain approached Elijah a little differently. He fell to his knees and pleaded with him to come and he did.

This story is significant in my mind for at least three reasons. First, it is remarkable to me that these people learned nothing from the meltdown on Mt. Carmel, when Elijah demonstrated the awesome power of God, who flame-broiled the

450 prophets of Baal. This insolence reveals the wickedness of the hearts of men. They recognized God's presence and power and still refused to honor Him as God. Doesn't this sound like intellectuals today, who see the evidence of God but who still refuse to acknowledge Him?

Second, the manner in which these captains approached Elijah is reflective of how we should approach the Lord. Two of them came to him arrogantly, demanding that He do what they say, while the third one came in humility and pleaded for the Lord's favor. "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5, 6). **We must remember who we are in light of who He is.** "God is in heaven and we are on earth, therefore, let our words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:3).

Finally, I cannot help but see here the relationship between God and government (the King). *The God of heaven is under no one's authority, not even the kings of earth; He cannot be shunned then summoned at their whim. Rather, the kings of earth are under God's authority, and they are accountable for their deeds.* **No matter how much power a ruler acquires for himself on earth, he will always have to submit to the God of heaven!**

## Daily Reflection

Have you ever been guilty of approaching God in arrogance, demanding that He do what you want? Why is it that God is opposed to the proud? Why is your pride so offensive to Him?

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# Miracles in the Making

June 15 — 2 Kings 2:1-25; 4:1-44

## Today In Your Reading...

The torch was passed from the prophet Elijah to his assistant, Elisha, who would now represent the Lord in the kingdom of Israel. Though our reading began with Elijah's departure to heaven, it was dominated by the miracles of Elisha.

While these events are difficult for us to fathom, we still believe that they occurred, because we know the Bible is God's Word and it is reliable.

In regards to Elijah's departure, we are not told why he left earth without dying. His exit was similar to that of Enoch, who was "walking with God one day and then God took him" (*Genesis 5:21-24*). These two men are the only humans, besides Jesus, to bypass death. Some have suggested that God is preparing them for their role as the two witnesses in the end times (*Rev. 11:3-12*). We just don't know, but we trust that God has His purposes.

What I find encouraging about Elijah's disappearance was the way in which it happened, with chariots and horses of fire. Obviously, these were not of this world. Why do I find this encouraging? Because for just a few seconds, the physical world in which we live was peeled back to reveal another dimension — the spiritual world. In other words, **there is much more to our existence than what we see and experience with our senses**. So much goes on behind the scenes that we are not aware of, and I like it when the Lord gives us a glimpse of it.

In regards to the miracles of Elisha, I was reminded of several truths. First, *miracles are a reminder of the presence and power of God*. They are not meant to honor the person or the prophet but the One they represent. Second, these miracles were accomplished in the wicked kingdom of Israel, which means that though the kings were not acknowledging God's authority, *He was still working His good purposes*. Third,

even though Israel had grown increasingly godless, we saw that the Lord still had a faithful remnant of people trusting in Him. Finally, each of Elisha's miracles not only encouraged those faithful to God but enlarged their faith in Him.

We should never allow the reality of miracles to bother us. Though we do not see them occur as regularly as did the people in Bible times, they still take place. **As much as those miracles were meant to encourage the people of that day, they are also meant to encourage us today**. We serve a powerful God who can move heaven and earth to fulfill His purposes. Let us have faith in God; we can trust Him.

## Daily Reflection

In 1959, a famous actor named Charlton Heston starred in a movie entitled "Ben-Hur." It was a production based on the book Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ by Lew Wallace. After a wild and terrible string of events take place in the life of Heston's character, he meets a wise man who changes his life. When Ben-Hur (Heston) says, "I don't believe in miracles," the wise man replies, "Your whole life is a miracle." He explains to Ben-Hur God's providence and how miracles occur in our sight everyday. It's just that we are oblivious to them.

**Your whole life is a miracle too.** Take a few minutes to reflect upon and write about the miracles that God has done in and through you.

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# New Skin, New Heart

June 16 — 2 Kings 5:1-8:15

Day 167 — 198 Days to Go

## Today In Your Reading...

God continued to do some amazing things through the prophet Elisha, from things as simple as cause a lost ax head to float to defeating entire armies with blindness or the sound of horses and chariots. It is still a mystery to me that, despite these demonstrations of power, the Israelites still insisted on worshiping idols and refused to worship God alone.

We also read of Elisha's greedy assistant Gehazi, who saw an opportunity to make some money and chased it down. However, because of his obsession with wealth and his decision to hide it from Elisha, he was plagued with leprosy. **We must never take credit for God's works. They are meant to glorify Him, not line our pockets with money.**

No doubt the most intriguing story from today's reading was that of Naaman, the Aramean warrior who had leprosy. God had arranged for a little Israelite girl to be taken into exile and made a servant in Naaman's household. When she saw her master dealing with this disease, she referred him to Elisha. She knew that he could heal Naaman by the power of God. Upon hearing of the prophet, Naaman investigated, traveled to Israel, visited Elisha's house (though he never saw him), and was eventually healed.

In the story of Naaman, there are numerous parallels to our salvation in Christ. First, **God's love was never reserved only for the Jews; it reaches even to the Gentiles.** More than that, His love even redeems His enemies. As Gentiles and sinners, we too were born enemies of God, and yet God did not withhold His love from us but extended His salvation to us as well.

Second, the little girl had a huge impact on Naaman's life, and, yet, all she did was tell him about her God. It is often a temptation to be-

lieve that because we are insignificant in the world's eyes, that we have no purpose; but **God can use anyone to do His work.** All we are asked to do is open our mouth and tell others about Him. He will take care of the rest.

Third, Naaman never saw Elisha, yet he believed by faith and obeyed his instructions to wash in the Jordan River. Likewise, we too, having never seen Jesus with our eyes, believe by faith and receive salvation, forgiveness for our sins. **We are washed clean and made new by faith alone in Christ alone.**

## Daily Reflection

God most often uses people to bring other people to a saving relationship with Him. Recall your salvation experience. Who was it that He used to bring you to Christ? Describe it here.

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Have you ever been tempted to keep quiet about God and His salvation? **God arranges opportunities regularly for you to share your faith.** Why is it that Christians do not tell more people about Christ?

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Did you notice what Naaman did after being restored? He never again bowed before other gods, but only to the Lord. Does your life outwardly reflect what God has done for you inwardly, or is your worship only skin deep?

# Vengeance Is Mine

## Today In Your Reading...

Wow, if our assigned passage was a movie, it would be rated PG-13, at least! It was literally full of blood and guts, from Jehoram's bulging bowel disease to the dogs dragging off Jezebel's dismembered body. Yikes! Who knew the Bible could be so graphic, right?

As difficult as it was reading these things, I am glad that they were included in the biblical account. After watching Ahab and Jezebel dominate the scene for so long and after reading of all the terrible things they did to God's people, especially His prophets, it was reassuring to read that these two maniacal figures were held accountable for their deeds. In fact, when God anointed Jehu to be King of Israel, his commission included these orders, "You are to destroy the family of Ahab. In this way, *I will avenge the murder of my prophets and all the Lord's servants who were killed by Jezebel*" (2 Kings 9:7).

Although Jehu was not a righteous man, he was obedient to the Lord in this command, which made him one of the best, if not the best, king in the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (10:30, 31). Jehu was noted to be cruel and vindictive, but **God is sovereign and He is able to use wicked men to achieve His purposes.**

One word kept coming back to my mind as I was reading today — *vengeance*. Vengeance is "the infliction of pain on another in return for an offense." Vengeance is "just retribution or punishment" (Webster 1828). Just retribution is that which is "upright, suitable, due, complete, and proper." **Vengeance is just; revenge is not.** Revenge is unjust retribution, when one inflicts pain on another maliciously or unlawfully.

With these definitions, one can quickly discern that **men very rarely seek vengeance; most often men seek revenge**, which is not only a

crime but a sin. **God is the only Being in the universe who can consistently inflict just retribution on an evil-doer with pure motives** and the force of law, His law. Thus, we find verses like this one, "Vengeance is Mine, and retribution; in due time their foot will slip. For the day of their calamity is near and the impending things are hastening upon them" (Deut. 32:35). Here's another one, "Never take your own revenge, but leave room for the wrath of God..." (Romans 12:19).

While the pain that was inflicted on Ahab and his family were horrible and hard to bear, they were proper; their punishment fit the crime. The people of God were innocent of any wrongdoing, yet they were slaughtered in atrocious ways. *For God to unleash His wrath on the perpetrators is reasonable and right.*

## Daily Reflection

Are you guilty of getting revenge on those who have hurt you in the past? Summarize why doing so is a sin?

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What is required of you to wait on the Lord's timing and let Him be the One to administer justice for personal hurts or offenses?

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**While the Lord's justice may not be swift, it is sure.** It will come. "Vengeance is Mine," He says. *Don't get in the way.* Don't jump the gun or you will only get shot.