

LESSON FOUR

ELIJAH

Text: I Kings 17, 18, 19.

A. **THE PROPHET ELIJAH:**

Elijah was one of the most remarkable characters of the Old Testament. His entire story is one of great fascination. Little is given of his background except what is stated in I Kings 17:1, "*Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead.*"

Gilead was the country east of the Jordan River, a high plateau of 2,000 feet elevation. It was here in the wild hills and ravines of Gilead that Elijah became acquainted with the true God of Israel. It was here that the fierce zeal of his prophetic ministry was nurtured.

It is claimed that his clothing consisted of a girdle of skin around his loins. He also wore a mantle or cape of sheepskin. He wore his hair long, hanging down his back.

His sudden appearance to King Ahab must have been somewhat frightening. His prophecy of drought was dramatic. "*There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my words*" (I Kings 17:1).

B. **THE IDOLATRY OF ISRAEL:**

At the time of Elijah, Israel was wholly given to idolatry. King Ahab had married a Phoenician wife, Jezebel, who was a champion of foreign culture.

Jezebel had the altars of Jehovah torn down and heathen ones built. She was responsible for the hatred and persecution of the true prophets. Jezebel introduced the idolatrous worship of Baal into Israel and the licentious orgies of the goddess Ashtoreth. It was a very dark hour for Israel.

C. **THE BROOK CHERITH: (I Kings 17:3-7).**

It was to be expected that Ahab would seek to take Elijah's life. The Lord instructed him to go eastward to the Brook Cherith and hide there. Each morning and evening, God sent ravens with bread and meat to feed him. Throughout Israel there was a drought accompanied by famine, but Elijah was miraculously fed until the brook dried up.

D. **THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH: (I Kings 17:8-24).**

Elijah had hid from Ahab during the forty-two months of the drought. Ahab hunted him everywhere, even in foreign countries (I Kings 18:10).

After the Brook Cherith had dried up, God told Elijah to go to Zarephath where a widow would sustain him. Zarephath was a Phoenician town situated between Tyre and Sidon. The last place to expect Elijah to find safety would be in Phoenicia, Jezebel's native country that is where the idolatrous worship of Baal came from.

The widow woman was apparently an Israelite who believed in God. She was extremely poor and lived alone with her son. Elijah found her gathering a few sticks to make a fire to prepare her last meal. At Elijah's request, she provided for Elijah first and the miracle of the meal and oil being replenished took place. As long as Elijah remained there, the widow and her son had food to eat.

While in her home, another miracle took place. The son became ill and apparently died. Elijah prayed and stretched himself upon him three times. He prayed again and the son revived (I Kings 17:17-24).

E. CONTEST ON MT. CARMEL:

At the end of the drought, there was very little vegetation still growing. King Ahab and his steward, Obadiah, were searching for grass when Elijah suddenly appeared to Obadiah. Obadiah was a believer in God and has supported a hundred young prophets in hiding. Obadiah was persuaded to tell Ahab that Elijah had appeared. The King and the prophet met and Elijah proposed a contest to see whether Baal or God was the true God.

The contest took place on Mt. Carmel. Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the groves were on one side and Elijah alone on the other. He challenges the people to accept the God who could answer by fire. Throughout the day, the Baal worshippers called frantically on their gods, but to no avail.

When it came Elijah's turn, he took some very simple steps in preparing the altar. It would be profitable to study these steps, for they are the same steps that need to be taken to bring revival in any generation:

1. The altar of the Lord is repaired...PRAYER;
2. The altar is built with twelve stones. Elijah ignored the division of the nation...UNITY;
3. The Name of the Lord...THE NAME OF JESUS IS ESSENTIAL;
4. Trench dug around the altar...SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD;
5. Wood is placed in order...CALVARY;
6. Bullock placed on the altar...SACRIFICE AND SHEDDING OF BLOOD;
7. Twelve barrels of water...WATER BAPTISM.

It only took a short majestic prayer for the fire to fall to consume the sacrifice. The people were convinced and cried, "*The Lord, He is God.*" At Elijah's command, the prophets were taken to the foot of the mountain and slain.

Elijah now prayed for rain. He sends his servant to look for clouds. The seventh time the servant reported a cloud like a man's hand. He sends his servant to warn Ahab to hasten back to Jezreel. As Ahab rode back, the prophet girded up his gown and ran before the chariot all the way to Jezreel, a distance of about 16 miles.

F. ELIJAH IN THE WILDERNESS: (I Kings 19:4-8).

Jezebel vowed vengeance and Elijah fled for his life. In the wilderness he was discouraged and despondent. He sat under a Juniper tree and despaired for his life. An angel touched him and bade him eat. A cake was baked on some coals and there was a cruse of water. Twice he was ordered to eat and with the strength of that food, Elijah went for 40 days.

G. ELIJAH AT HOREB: (I Kings 19:9-21).

At Horeb, Elijah lodged in a cave. Here he experienced a mighty wind, an earthquake and fire. Then he heard the still small voice of the Lord. He was commissioned to anoint Hazael as King of Syria, Jehu as King of Israel and Elisha to be his own successor. Elijah was assured that there were 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal.

He first found Elisha ploughing in the field. He cast his mantle upon Elisha. Elisha went back to kiss his father and mother. He killed his oxen and fed the people. He then followed Elijah until he was caught away.

H. NABOTH'S VINEYARD: (I Kings 21:1-24).

When Jezebel took Naboth's vineyard for Ahab and had Naboth murdered, Elijah met the King in the vineyard and rebuked him. He prophesied that the dogs would lick his blood in the same spot that Naboth died.

I. ELIJAH WAS TRANSLATED: (II Kings 2:11).

Elijah and Enoch were the only two men who were caught up to heaven without dying.

As Elijah and Elisha walked along, a chariot and horses of fire parted them and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

Later Elijah appeared to Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3,4). Some believe that Elijah will be one of the two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11.

Certainly this prophet was one of the greatest characters of the Old Testament, yet he was a man of like passions as we are (James 5:17).

LESSON FOUR

SELF HELP TEST

- A. Write a character sketch of Elijah, the prophet.
- B. Why was Elijah needed in Israel at this time?
- C. Describe the experiences of Elijah:
1. In the wilderness:
 2. At Zarephath:
 3. At Horeb:
- D. Show how the steps took at Mt. Carmel are also similar to what should be done today for revival.
- E. In detail, show how Elijah was a man "of like passions" such as we are (James 5:17).