

**Week 24: Kingdom Power**  
**Elijah- One Man Standing in the Gap**  
**June 15/16**  
**1 Kings 17:1-7; 18:20-46**

**Summary and Goal:**

**Main Passages:**

1 Kings 17:1-7 (Chronological Bible, June 10, pg. 680)

1 Kings 18:20-46 (Chronological Bible, June 11, pg. 682-683)

**Session Outline:**

- 1. Gap-Standers Take Their Stand with Total Surrender**
- 2. Gap-Standers Rebuild the Altar**
- 3. A Gap-Stander's Most Effective Tool is Prayer**

**Session in a Sentence:** King Ahab led the people away from God into sin; God sent His faithful prophet Elijah to stand in the gap between God and the people of Israel, calling on God's miraculous power to help them find their way back to Him.

**Kingdom Connection:** Whenever the kings or priests of Israel led the people into sin, God would send a faithful prophet to warn them and call them back to Him. Elijah served as a faithful gap-standing praying prophet who faced down evil on behalf of God's people, calling them back to Him.

**Missional Application:** As believers, we are called to stand in the gap for those who have wandered away from God and for those who do not know Him, taking a stand for Christ.

## Introduction

For over 100 years the Israelites lived under the kingdom reign of three kings, Saul, David and Solomon. God's anointed leaders were not without sin and failure, but as great leaders of the Jews, these three rulers led a united kingdom. At the end of King Solomon's life, strife broke out in the land which led to a civil war and the nation ultimately divided into a northern kingdom, most often referred to as Israel, and a southern kingdom, most often called Judah. This division remained until both kingdoms were taken into captivity.

The Northern Kingdom, Israel had nineteen monarchs over a two hundred year period until the Assyrians invaded them and all nineteen were wicked, each and every one.

The Southern Kingdom, Judah was under the leadership of seventeen monarchs over a three hundred year period, eight of whom feared and followed the Lord their God, nine who "did evil in the eyes of the Lord." The Southern Kingdom fell to captivity under the Babylonians for seventy years.

All Kings had the same call – 1 Kings 2:1-4. The charge from the Lord that King David gave to Solomon:

*Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he <sup>1a</sup>charged Solomon his son, saying: <sup>2</sup> "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. <sup>3</sup> And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; <sup>4</sup> that the LORD may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' (Chronological Bible, May 6, pg. 501)*

Be strong, prove yourself a man, walk in the ways of the Lord, according to His Word. If only they had heeded his advice.

Today we are going to look at a series of events that could be called the best western never written, The Good, The Bad, and the Undecided. Starring the worst king, Ahab as the bad, the gap-standing prophet Elijah as the good and the Israelites as the undecided. It was a showdown on the top of Mount Carmel like no other.

## THE BAD

Let's start with King Ahab, "the Bad." Look at 1 Kings 16:31-33

*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. <sup>32</sup> Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup> 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.** (Chronological Bible, June 10, pg. 677)*

For over 22 years Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord. He led the Israelites into idolatrous worship of false gods, he considered it no big deal to walk in sin. Ahab married a devout worshipper of Baal, Jezebel, and raised up altars for Baal, including the Asherah mentioned in verse 33. Baal was the Canaanite storm god and Baal worship became attractive to a nation that depended on rain for survival. As the King goes, so goes the kingdom. The spiritual chasm between God's people and God grew wider and wider.

But God. As believers looking back on the history of Israel we see that whenever the kings or priests led the people into sin, God would send a faithful prophet to warn them and call them back to Him. This time, He sends Elijah the Tishbite.

### **THE GOOD**

*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."<sup>2</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, <sup>3</sup> "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. <sup>4</sup> And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."<sup>5</sup> So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. <sup>6</sup> The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. <sup>7</sup> And it happened after a while that the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. (1 Kings 17:1-7, Chronological Bible, June 10<sup>th</sup>, pg. 680 )*

Israel is in spiritual crisis. Then, over the rise from Gilead silhouetted by the rising sun comes one lone man, Elijah the Tishbite, "the Good." He became God's instrument of confrontation, standing in the gap between good and evil, calling God's people to repentance. His name means "My God is Jehovah," or "The Lord is my God," which is significant for many reasons; one is that Ahab did not flat out deny God, he wavered in his allegiance, equating Him with other gods, looking to see who best could serve him in the moment. A distinction that isn't really a distinction at all.

## 1. Gap-standers Take Their Stand with Total Surrender

Elijah suddenly appears on the scene, stands before the most evil King to rule the land and delivers a message from God - a three-year drought. Israel depended on the seasonal rains for their crops and livestock; without it, there would be famine in the land. God had made it clear that if they walked in His statutes and kept His commands He would give them rain in season, but if they did not, the heavens would become like iron, the earth like bronze and the rain like powder and dust; their work would be in vain. (Deuteronomy 28, Leviticus 26) For the next three years, the word of Elijah would control the weather in Israel! This three-year drought would prepare the people for the showdown on Mount Carmel where their wavering allegiance would be called to question, and they would be forced to choose.

In one verse, just like that, Elijah appears on the scene, stands alone before Ahab and gets in his face, confronting him with no apparent fear or trepidation. Standing in the gap between good and evil, Elijah is a man on a mission, declaring himself a servant of God with a job to do. That kind of backbone is evidence of a depth of understanding that Someone has your back -- Elijah was a gap-stander totally surrendered to God.

The very next verse God tells Elijah to go hide by the brook of Cherith and that He will provide for him there. He doesn't say how long, he doesn't tell him how it's going to end, God just gives Elijah the next step and Elijah obeys by faith. His total surrender gives him the confidence to do whatever God asks. God leads His faithful followers one step at a time as we tune our heart to His Word. Total surrender to the Provider gives us the courage to stand and to act on His Word.

Today, our Lord is looking for gap-standers. Those who have the backbone to stand alone in the face of idolatry, in every sector of our community and culture, declaring that our God lives. Chuck Swindoll puts it this way, *"those who find comfort in the court of Ahab can never bring themselves to stand in the gap with Elijah."* The quest continues. God is looking for men and women willing to courageously declare our allegiance to Him and His ways.

At the brook, God provides safety and sustenance. The brook provided water and the ravens brought him bread and meat. For three years the Lord provided for Elijah one step at a time, preparing him for the encounter to come. Like Joseph in jail, the Lord had things to accomplish in Elijah's inner life that would be useful in time. A.W.Tozer often writes about heroes of the faith in this way, *"It's doubtful that God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply."* It was a time of transition. In the rest of chapter

17, the Lord takes him through advanced training in Zarephath where the Lord performed two miracles through His servant Elijah showing that God sustains life ( the oil and the flour never ran out) and that God imparts life (raising the boy from the dead as Elijah interceded for him). Elijah went to boot camp in Cherith as a surrendered servant, furthered his training in Zarephath, and came out as a holy man of God. He has learned to trust the Provider, not the provision. Elijah is ready for the showdown at Mount Carmel.

## 2. Gap-standers Rebuild the Altar

In the third year of the drought, the Lord called Elijah to go and present himself to Ahab, it was time for the rain. Remember, the drought was extremely severe. Think Lion King, when Scar takes over and lets the hyenas rule – no water, no food, wasteland. Ahab, the self-centered king that he is, sends out his faithful servant Obadiah to search for water and grass for Ahab’s personal use. Forget the people, he only cares about himself. Scripture tells us that Obadiah was a God-fearing man who had hidden one hundred prophets when Jezebel went on a rampage to massacre them during the drought. (1Kings 18:33) And as Obadiah was out and about, he ran into Elijah who asked him to tell his master, King Ahab, where he was. Fearing for his life, but fearing the Lord more, Obadiah took that message to Ahab, and he came to find Elijah. This is where we pick up the story in 1 Kings 18:

*17 Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?”*

*18 And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals.*

*19 Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” (1 Kings 18:17-19, Chronological Bible, June 11<sup>th</sup>, pg. 682)*

This encounter must have been something to witness! Like gunslingers in the wild west they stand before each other, and Ahab blames Elijah for the mess they are living in. He calls Elijah a troubler. Chuck Swindoll writes that this word in Hebrew means viper, asp or snake and that Ahab is basically calling Elijah a “sneaky snake in the grass.”

Courageously, Elijah stands firm and puts the blame where it belongs, back on Ahab. And he calls for a challenge. A showdown between idolatry and the Living God. He tells Ahab to assemble the priests and prophets of the false gods and the children of Israel. Then Elijah addresses the assembly:

<sup>21</sup> And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. <sup>22</sup> Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. <sup>23</sup> Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. <sup>24</sup> Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God."

So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

<sup>25</sup> Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it." (I Kings 18:21-25, Chronological Bible, June 11, pg. 682-683)

## **THE UNDECIDED**

Here we see the "Undecided" characters in our western – the people of Israel. Elijah's plan was masterful. He calls the people to cease living divided lives and to follow the Lord alone in verse 21, but the people fail to answer. It says, "But the people answered him not a word." So Elijah sets out to prove that Our God is the one true God, that Jehovah reigns over all. If someone were to assess your life right now by the way you are living, would they say that you are wavering between two opinions or taking a stand? Its all too easy to get caught up in running with the devil all week but trying to stand with Jesus on Sundays. Its time we reassess our priorities and take a stand for Christ.

Let's see what happens next:

<sup>26</sup> So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. <sup>27</sup> And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." <sup>28</sup> So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with <sup>u</sup>knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. <sup>29</sup> And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. (I Kings 18:26-29, Chronological Bible, June 11, pg. 682-683)

Elijah's plan was genius, and the people recognized it as such. Surely, if Baal could do anything, he could start a fire. And same of Jehovah God. But try as they might the priests and prophets of Baal could not rouse him, ever after taunting by Elijah. From morning to night they tried everything, to no avail.

It was Elijah's turn.

All he had been through for the last 3 years prepared him for this literal moment of truth. It was Elijah's greatest hour.

I went to Mount Carmel this past year when we were in Israel and the giant statue of Elijah, high on a pedestal, bearded with a knife raised high above his head is a dramatic image of a dramatic moment in time. One man, standing in the gap between good and evil, between a Holy God and His people, a gap-stander totally surrendered to God's plan to bring His people back to Him. His first step is to rebuild the altar, read with me:

*<sup>30</sup> Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. <sup>31</sup> And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." <sup>32</sup> Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. <sup>33</sup> And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." <sup>34</sup> Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. <sup>35</sup> So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water. . (I Kings 18:30-35, Chronological Bible, June 11, pg. 683)*

Elijah draws the people near to witness and assist with repairing the altar of the God Most High that had been destroyed during this 60 year period of idolatry in Israel. It is a call to repentance and surrender. Since the days of Abraham, the Israelites built an altar and offered a sacrifice for their sins as an act of worship.

Elijah rebuilds it using 12 stones, representing the 12 tribes of Israel, the foundation of Israel, reaffirming the unity of God's people and the covenant He made with them and offering a sacrifice, atonement on their behalf. It's a visual illustration, using 12 memorial stones just like in Joshua 4, stones that serve as a reminder to the people that God is with them, He alone is their God. He always was, He still is and will always be the One, True God. It's not that God is jealous just for Himself. He is jealous for us because He knows that He alone can fulfill our need and deepest longing. God tells us

to come boldly into His presence. We can do that because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The Lord grants us the privilege to come before Him with authority because of our position in Christ.

### 3. A Gap-stander's Most Effective Tool is Prayer

*<sup>36</sup> 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 Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. <sup>37</sup> Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."*

*<sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. <sup>39</sup> Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" (1 Kings 18:36-39, Chronological Bible, June 11<sup>th</sup>, pg. 683 )*

Elijah prays. Not fancy church words, not empty repetitive words. Just a simple, to the point request seeking God's glory and that God's will be done to prove once and for all that He. Is. God.

And the response was immediate. Prayers went up and fire came down, consuming all and convincing all present that God alone is God. Even the stones and the water in the trenches were gone. God's miraculous power was shown and the hearts of the people were turned back to God.

Prayer wasn't Elijah's last resort, it was his first act. He put it all on the altar and prayed. That's how you deal with the enemy. So often we try everything but that. Later, at the end of Chapter 18 we see Elijah pray again, this time for rain. He bowed down to the ground and did not get up until a cloud was on the horizon. He continued to watch and pray, watch and pray. He was absolutely certain that God would answer his prayer. And He did.

*Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain." <sup>42</sup> So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, <sup>43</sup> and said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea."*

*So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And seven times he said, "Go again."<sup>44</sup> Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.'* "

*<sup>45</sup> Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. <sup>46</sup> Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.(I Kings 18:41-46, Chronological Bible, June 11, pg. 683)*

Prayer is the most effective tool we have as believers. James 5:16 tells us "... *the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*" God calls us boldly into His presence through the privilege of prayer because of our position in Christ Jesus. It is a privilege and a tool that is underutilized and underestimated. Elijah knew that the miraculous power of God is released in prayer.

It was a magnificent showdown at Mount Carmel. Elijah, the lone gap-standing prophet took on the most evil king of all time, calling God's people to take a stand and choose our God, the One, True God as their god. Every day we live we have a choice to live in the courts of Ahab or stand in the gap with Elijah. Max Lucado writes that if there are a thousand steps between you and God, He will take all but one. He will leave the final step for us. The choice is ours.

**Resources:**

Chuck Swindoll, *Elijah- a Man of Heroism and Humility*

Jon Courson's Application Commentary – Old Testament

Warren Wiersbe, *Be Responsible*, 1 Kings

Charles Stanley, *Life Principles Bible*