

Kings Series #7

"The Source of Our Strength" - 1 Kings 17:1-16

I. INTRODUCTION [READ TEXT]

II. BODY

A. *The Times Then*

1. Depending on your perspective, it was either the best of times, or the worst of times
2. Israel's fortunes had rarely looked better
 - a. the nation was prosperous
 - b. and they enjoyed peace and security
3. But the king was a fiend and his wife was a demon
4. Moral rot and decay had reached far into the soul of virtually every family in the land
5. The king's name was Ahab, and scripture tells us that he was more wicked than any king before him
6. Not only did he follow in the sins of Jeroboam, which we considered last week, but he went further and re-introduced the worship of the idols and gods of the Canaanites who had once possessed the land
7. But the height of his folly was his marriage to the Sidonian princess, Jezebel
8. This gal was a unabashed apologist for evil and when her moving van pulled up to Ahab's palace in Samaria, she unloaded more than her baggage - she also unloaded her Baals
 - a. and I'm not talking about bales of clothing
 - b. I mean "B—A—A—L"; the Phoenician god of power
 - c. she also unloaded her idols to Asherah, who was Baal's female consort and the goddess of fertility
 - d. I would not dare to describe the horrible perversions of how these gods were worshipped by the Phoenicians
 - 1) but let it suffice to say that what is considered hard core smut and absolutely unthinkable perversion and outright crime, even by today's standards, were normal and accepted fare among the Phoenicians at this time
 - 2) in fact, the Phoenicians had launched out from their base at Tyre and Sidon and had colonized the shore of northern Africa; called Carthage
 - 3) in later years when the Romans came into contact with Carthage, they were sickened and shocked by the terrible perversions and gross behavior of the Phoenicians; and that was as judged by the Romans!
 - e. Jezebel brought all this wickedness with her

- f. and soon, what had been the practice of Sidon became the practice in the cities and villages of Israel
- g. Ahab & Jezebel were at the forefront of the parade of idolatry and evil
- h. out of her own purse Jezebel built a temple to Asherah in Jezreel and staffed it with 450 priests of Baal
- i. she was dedicated to the cause of paganism and led in the destruction of the worship of the true God by demolishing His altars wherever she found them

B. "And . . . "

- 1. Such were the days in Israel
- 2. It was bleak with no ray of hope for the faithful
- 3. In fact, later we read they had all gone into hiding for fear of Jezebel's wrath
- 4. We might suppose that this was the end of all
 - a. that the worship of Jehovah would be snuffed out
 - b. that the judgment of God foretold by Moses and forewarned by Ahijah the prophet just a few years before would not smite the land and lay it waste
- 5. But God never leaves Himself without a witness
- 6. So the first word of Ch. 17 is a welcome one . . .
- 7. "And . . . "
 - a. it is a word ominous to God's foes
 - b. but full of hope and promise to His people

C. V. 1

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. Who is this Elijah?
- 2. He explodes on the scene, and then retreats to the wilderness
- 3. Who is he and where is he from?
- 4. Well: He is a nobody from nowhere!
 - a. whereas most people are introduced in scripture with the formula, "So & so, son or Such & such"
 - b. Elijah's background is so humble, it isn't even mentioned
 - c. and his home, the village of Tishbi is so obscure we have no idea where it was located
 - d. all we know is that it was in Gilead,
 - 1) on the eastern frontier of the Jordan
 - 2) a wild and rocky wilderness
 - 3) inhabited by no one but poor shepherds
 - e. Elijah is described as a shepherd;
 - f. a hairy man with a modest garment made of camel's hair
- 5. It seems that scripture goes out of its way to describe Elijah as a normal, average Joe

6. There was nothing in his background or natural ability that marked him out as any different than anyone else
7. In fact, in the NT, James goes out of his way to speak of Elijah as a normal guy

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. (James 5:17)

8. He had a nature like ours: He was an ordinary guy, a regular Joe
 - a. later in his story we see him in a bout of deep and dark depression so great he asked God to take his life
 - b. he bemoaned the fact that he was all alone and no one cared about God
 - c. he threw himself a pity party and no one came
9. Like all of us; he knew moments of weakness and doubt
10. But here, at the beginning of his story, we see him standing before Ahab with a bold and provocative word
11. Elijah was distressed over the moral and spiritual state of the nation
12. And he knew with whom the responsibility lay - Ahab!
13. So he prayed and prayed and prayed
 - a. and as he prayed, he was reminded of Moses' words in Deut. 11:17

[If you turn from the Lord and worship other gods,] the Lord's anger [shall] be aroused against you, and [will] He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you [shall] perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.

- b. Elijah knew the time had come for this word to be fulfilled
 - c. so armed with a conviction based on God's promise
 - d. he prayed it would now come to pass
14. Then, compelled by the Spirit, he left the rough hills of Gilead and entered the sumptuous and elegant halls of the palace in Samaria
15. The coarse shepherd from Tishbi confronted the refined shepherd of Israel
16. But his words were anything but what would be expected of an awe-struck country bumpkin

"As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

17. Ahab & Jezebel may have thought to stamp out the worship of Jehovah
18. But they could never do away with Jehovah Himself
19. So Elijah begins with these words, "As Jehovah, God of Israel lives . . . "
 - a. this is his starting place
 - b. the living and eternal God
 - c. nothing else may be certain, but *this* is . . .
 - d. God IS—He LIVES!!!
20. And the source of Elijah's strength is found in the next words
21. ". . .before Whom I stand . . . "
22. He was standing before Ahab
 - a. but he was more conscious of the presence of a greater

- b. Ahab was merely an earthly monarch
 - c. Elijah stood in a high court, before the Heavenly King
23. And knowing who he was and what he was about - Elijah dared to utter a word of terrible judgment upon Ahab and his kingdom
 24. There would be no rain for years, until Elijah prayed and released them
 25. Drought and famine would strike the land; all because of Ahab & Jezebel's wickedness

D. The Supply Of Strength

1. Then as we read on, Elijah went out and lived in the wilderness for a time
2. While there, each morning and evening birds brought him food to eat
3. Till the drought dried up the stream
4. Then he went to the famine stricken village of Zarephath
 - a. where, by God's direction
 - b. he was provided for by a destitute widow
5. The lesson to be learned from all this is to trust in the Lord to supply what we need
6. At each place, God was Elijah's source of strength
 - a. whether it was standing before Ahab,
 - b. or living beside the Brook,
 - c. or in the village
 - d. God was Elijah's constant supply

E. Elijah As Example

1. Friends, this is the great lesson Elijah teaches us
2. As James tells us, he was a man of like nature and passions as us
3. He was not some special, spiritual giant
4. He was not born into the ranks of the privileges
5. He was a nobody
6. He wasn't a strikingly good looking fellow that commanded the admiration and attention of others
7. He was hairy and unkempt and easily overlooked
8. Like you and I, he was given to times of doubt and depression
9. But when he believed God, he REALLY believed Him and put himself at God's disposal
10. And God used him in mighty and powerful ways
11. Elijah shines all the more brightly because he lived and worked at a time of great spiritual darkness
12. Well, our time runs parallel to those darks days in Israel

G. The Times Now

1. It doesn't take much imagination to see the parallels between that time and this
2. These are both the best of times and the worst of times, depending on your perspective
3. We enjoy tremendous prosperity & luxury

- a. our standard of living is the highest in the history of the world
- b. the advances and benefits of technology are all around us
- 4. We enjoy security and peace from external enemies
- 5. But from a more thoughtful perspective, the times are marked by barbarianism and cruelty
 - a. we may *look* prosperous, but we are living well beyond our means
 - b. debt is epidemic and well beyond our capacity to pay
 - c. but our financial debt is only symptomatic of a deeper moral and spiritual bankruptcy
 - d. our *borders* may be secure, but our greatest enemies are *within*
 - e. our streets aren't safe, our schools are a battle zone; even our churches and homes are no longer safe
 - f. the poor and weak are victimized by evil men and often for nothing more than a crust of bread or a pair of athletic shoes
- 6. Why, there are those that would say that the parallels between Israel and ourselves go further
 - a. all the way to our leader and his wife
 - b. for though he, like Ahab, professes to be a follower of God, his actions reveal a vastly different loyalty
 - c. and she seems to stand for virtually every cause the faithful find repugnant while seeking to remove the influence of godliness from the land
 - d. together they seem bent on molding the nation into a new image more resembling classic paganism than the faith of the Forefathers
- 7. And so I ask, Where are the Elijah's of God?
- 8. Where are those men and women, who are conscious that they stand before the living God, and dare to speak up and speak out?

H. The Lesson

- 1. Friends, let's learn the lesson of Elijah's life
- 2. God doesn't need our ABILITY - Only our AVAILABILITY!
- 3. Many people think themselves disqualified to be sued of God because they aren't
 - a. educated
 - b. wealthy, powerful
 - c. pretty, gifted with talent
- 4. Hear this and mark it well: Great natural ability is often the biggest hindrance, not help, to being used of God
- 5. The man or woman, boy or girl, that is most qualified to be used of God is the one who feels most un-qualified
- 6. The one most ready to be used powerfully by the Lord is the one who feels most weak!
- 7. 2 Cor. 3:5-6 [a]

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, who also made us sufficient . . .

8. God seems to delight in surrounding Himself with incompetents
9. 1 Cor 1:26-31

{21} You see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

{27} But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

{28} and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

{29} that no flesh should glory in His presence.

{30} But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption;

{31} that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

10. The beginning of effectiveness for God lies in realizing our own inadequacies and then casting ourselves into God's hands
11. 2 Cor. 12:9-10

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

12. Consider Moses . . .

- a. he was raised in the court of Egypt, the most powerful and advanced nation of the day
- b. he was well educated, wealthy, and in a position of great power
- c. but he thought to serve God & deliver his people by using his political position and physical strength
- d. he was so full of himself, there was no room for God
- e. his plans of doing great things for God backfired
- f. and it took 40 years of living on the back side of the desert before he was emptied and made ready for being used of the Lord
- g. when God finally did appear to him and called him to go and deliver His people from slavery,
- h. he tried to beg off the job by using every excuse he could dream up
- i. but every excuse only *proved* he was the man for the job
- j. God's final word to Moses, in effect was, "Look, **I** will be with you. Now Go!"

13. Or consider Jeremiah

- a. he was but a child; but God called and used him
- b. like Moses, Jeremiah tried to beg off the call
- c. Jerusalem 1:6-9

{6} said I: "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I *am* a youth."

{7} But the LORD said to me: "Do not say, 'I *am* a youth,' For you shall go to all to

whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak.

{8} Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you," says the LORD.

{9} Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

14. You young people, your youth and lack of experience may be the very thing that commends you to be used by God
15. Elijah had nothing and no one but God: But he knew that was enough!

I. Our Day

1. Friends, the days are dark and evil
2. It is time for God's people to arise
3. Not in their own strength, but in the strength He gives
4. As the Lord lives, before whom we stand, it is time to declare His word with boldness and conviction
5. It's time to say it as it is
6. That unless we turn from our wicked ways - His judgment will come
7. We need to be boldly confident that as we declare His word - it will not return void
8. Some of you have friends or relatives that you've been reluctant to speak to about the Lord for fear of "turning them off"
9. Now, let's think about that
 - a. if they aren't Christians, they are already turned off
 - b. even worse, they're dead—in sin
 - c. don't be afraid of turning them off
 - d. you see, the bible says that no one seeks God on their own
 - e. the only things that will save the lost are your prayers and your faithful sharing of the truth of Christ in word and deed
 - f. don't worry about *offending* them
 - g. the lost are supposed to be offended, at first
 - h. the hope is that they will move from offense to forgiveness once they realize how really needy they are
 - i. so it is our aim to offend them at first; that is a normal part of the gospel's work in a person's life
10. Christian speak up!
11. Trust in the Lord before whom you stand!

III. CONCLUSION

A. Perilous Times

1. These are perilous times
2. But perilous times are times of unparalleled opportunity
3. In Ephesians 5:15 we read . . .

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

4. Carpe Diem - Seize the day!
5. Elijah did—and his simple act of courage helped stem the tide of evil
6. YOU can be a catalyst for change in your sphere of influence
7. You can be Elijah in your world!