

October 11, 2015

Heroes of Faith

"...Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel for twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him...and did more to provoke the Lord, God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him." I Kings 16:29-33

After the reign of David, the man after God's own heart, his son Solomon ruled in Jerusalem. Solomon was a powerful ruler who consolidated all of the victories that his father had won and who created in Jerusalem a beautiful modern city with the Temple of God as its centerpiece. During his reign Israel enjoyed all of the benefits of the promises which God had made to Abraham, but that did not cause them or their king to be faithful to the Lord.

After the death of Solomon the crown came to his son Rehoboam. Unlike his father, Rehoboam had little wisdom and quickly alienated much of Israel who in turn rebelled against him. The Kingdom that Saul and David had secured and Solomon had fully developed in fulfillment of God's promises lasted little more than one hundred twenty years, before civil war divided the country between Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

The story of the kings of these two countries who were supposed to be God's people is really very sad. Israel's kings were, without exception, evil leaders and eventually God destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. With a few exceptions the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah were no better and it too, would eventually be carried off into captivity.

With so many evil leaders over God's people it makes the condemnation of Ahab, king of Israel, all the more horrible. To be the worst among so many evil kings is a terrible condemnation. God however, was not willing to just let Ahab's evil go, and so he sent Elijah as a prophet to the royal court in Samaria to warn the king of the consequences of his sin.

Elijah's first message from God was that it would not rain in all of the northern kingdom for three full years and it didn't. Of course his prophecy of this dire circumstance did not make Elijah popular and so he fled, hiding in the Kerith Ravine and eventually with the Widow of Zarephath. For three years it did not rain in Israel until finally the Lord sent Elijah back to Ahab to lift the drought.

Eventually God called Elijah to represent him in a contest with the evil prophets of the false god Baal. Elijah's victory over them at Mount Carmel was complete, but the result was not repentance in the hearts of Ahab and Jezebel. Instead they put a contract out on Elijah and he was forced to flee all the way down to Mount Sanai. There God met personally with Elijah, not in the storm or the earthquake or in the fire, but in a still small voice.



Many of us know the story of Elijah's end. He is one of only two men in all of human history who did not die. Elijah was, of course, taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. In his short career as a prophet Elijah performed more miracles than nearly anyone else in Biblical history with the exception of Moses and Jesus. As Moses came to represent the Law, Elijah came to represent the prophets and years later when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John it would be Moses, the law giver, and Elijah the prophet who would meet him on that mountain.

As a hero Elijah demonstrates how powerfully God can work through his people, but he also represents how weak we can become when we begin to think it all depends on us. When God calls us to do his will, no matter what his will might require, it will be his strength and not ours that is demonstrated. We are never alone and it is never up to just us regardless of how isolated we might feel. God is all powerful even when we are not. M