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## **The Gospel According to Elijah**

### **Kings and Chronicles**

#### **Series: In the Days of Elijah**

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**The Village Church**

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#### **I. Introduction**

##### **A. Story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Carmel – 1 Kings 18**

1. Reveals the extraordinary greatness of Elijah
  - a. Victorious against all odds
    - (1) Outnumbered 850-1
    - (2) Deck stacked against him in sacrifices

##### **B. Elijah had been hiding**

1. Prophecy to Ahab about drought
  - a. Indicating his personal involvement in its duration and cessation
  - b. Let him into hiding
2. First to Gilead (Transjordan) – Brook Cherith; fed by ravens
3. Then to Zarephath in Sidon – cared for by widow
  - a. Jezebel's home country
4. Lasted for 3 ½ years

##### **C. Finally, God tells Elijah it's time for the drought to end**

1. Needs to show himself to Ahab – give him the good news
2. Famine so desperate that both Ahab and Obadiah (godly head of Ahab's household) were out looking for grass to feed livestock
  - a. (You'd think they'd have servants to do that; famine was that severe)
3. Elijah runs into Obadiah; asks him to arrange meeting
  - a. Obadiah is reluctant; afraid of Ahab
    - (1) Ahab had been looking for Elijah to kill him
    - (2) Obadiah is afraid that if he tells Ahab about a meeting, Elijah would have disappeared again; Ahab would be angry and kill Obadiah
4. Elijah reassures Obadiah; promises him that he'll show for the meeting

##### **D. Elijah has encounter with Ahab**

1. Call each other names – "troubler of Israel"
  - a. Elijah's accusation is, of course, true
    - (1) Ahab has led Israel to sin by rejecting the commandments of God and following the Baals
2. Elijah requests encounter with prophets and Baal and Asherah
  - a. Baal – Ahab's prophets (Baal is the male deity)

- b. Asherah – Jezebel’s prophets (Asherah is the female deity; consort of Baal)
    - 3. Total – 850 prophets
    - 4. Elijah also requests the presence of “all Israel” at the encounter
    - 5. Location – Mt. Carmel
      - a. High hill overlooking the Mediterranean on the coast
  - E. Ahab does what Elijah suggests
    - 1. Interesting to consider why he did this
      - a. Jezebel doesn’t seem to have been around to influence him
      - b. Perhaps thought he was in superior position for a contest – 850-1
      - c. Developing respect for Elijah?
      - d. Bible doesn’t really say
  - F. Elijah opens his encounter on Mt. Carmel with memorable challenge – not to the prophets but to the people
    - 1. “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”
    - 2. People don’t respond – sit on the fence
  - G. **Elijah challenges the prophets to duel of sacrifices**
    - 1. Each choose oxen
    - 2. Built altar with wood
    - 3. Put no fire under it
    - 4. Put ox on the altar
    - 5. Pray to their God to provide the fire
    - 6. Whichever God responds, that’s the true, living God
    - 7. (Evident that Elijah was instructed by God to engage in this contest; to do otherwise would have been presumption on his part)
      - a. If you’re going to engage in a direct confrontation like this, better know that God has called you to do it!
    - 8. All Israel likes the idea
      - a. Whether they want to find out who the true God is, or whether they were up for an afternoon’s entertainment, like a prophetic super bowl, the Bible doesn’t really say
      - b. But the people are up for it!
  - H. **Prophets of Baal went first**
    - 1. Morning to noon – prayed to Baal
      - a. Would that we would have that much passion to pray to the true God! Not many of us would spend that much time in prayer!
    - 2. Even jumped about on the altar to encourage Baal to respond
    - 3. Elijah begins around noon to mock the prophets of Baal
      - a. God is occupied, on a journey, asleep – need to call louder!
    - 4. Prophets of Baal responded with even more passion
      - a. Cut themselves; blood flowed on the altar
    - 5. All this took place until the time of the evening sacrifice (customary for the time of worship of Yahweh)
    - 6. No one answered; no response from Baal

I. **Elijah's turn**

1. Repaired altar for Yahweh worship
  - a. Had fallen into disrepair for want of use due to the idolatrous worship
  - b. Like churches in Europe that have become museums or torn down
2. Rebuilt the altar with clear reference to Israel and the God of Israel
  - a. 12 stones with reference to the tribes
    - (1) Indicating continuity with Judah since more than the 10 northern tribes were included
3. Built trench around the wood altar
4. Drenched it with a lot of water
  - a. Demonstrated that no fire had been placed there
  - b. Made it more difficult for Yahweh to cause the sacrifice to catch fire
5. **Prayed**
  - a. Simple prayer
    - (1) While fervent, passion didn't even come close to prophets of Baal
  - b. **1 Kings 18:36–37** (ESV) —
    - (1) 36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word.
    - (2) 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.”
  - c. Purpose of prayer – God would be known as God
    - (1) Ultimately, that conversions would result – hearts would be turned back to Yahweh
6. Fire came down in answer to prayer
7. People responded
  - a. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.”

J. **Elijah then commanded the seizure of the prophets of Baal**

1. Who seized them?
  - a. Presumably “all Israel” who had been convinced that Yahweh is God
2. Took them down to Brook Kishon; killed them there

K. Elijah then tells Ahab that it's time for a feast – rain is coming; drought is about to end

1. Ahab better get a head start so his chariot won't get stuck in the mud
2. Ahab took off in his chariot to Jezreel (summer home)

L. Rain fell, drought ended

M. Story is significant in itself

1. Even more remarkable – demonstration of the very same principles on which the gospel is based
2. In fact, we can see the gospel illustrated in this story
  - a. In that illustration, we can begin to understand the way God loves to work to create worshipers for Himself

## II. Initiated by God's grace

- A. Context – drought (3 ½ years)
  1. People desperate for rain
  2. Crops dying; livestock can't eat
  3. Remember widow of Zarephath – preparing her last meal for herself and son when Elijah showed up
  4. Nothing they could do about it
    - a. All the searching went for nought; no water anywhere
- B. After the period of the drought God comes to Elijah
  1. **1 Kings 18:1** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth."
  2. God sending rain is the very grace these people needed
  3. Wasn't because the people were praying to Yahweh that He responded
    - a. They were still steeped in idolatry
  4. Rain is seen as the very act of grace in the Bible
    - a. Water is even seen to represent the presence of God in gracious provision
    - b. **Psalms 65:9** (ESV) —
      - (1) 9 You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide their grain, for so you have prepared it.
    - c. **Matthew 5:45** (ESV) —
      - (1) 45 ... For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
    - d. Misunderstood – some think the sun is good and rain is evil; God gives both good and bad to righteous and unrighteous
      - (1) But in reality both the sun and rain are representative of God's goodness
    - e. **Matthew 5:44–45** (ESV) —
      - (1) 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
      - (2) 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
- C. Rain is evidence of the grace of God – God initiated it
- D. That's the same way with the Gospel
  1. **John 3:16** (ESV) —

- a. 16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- 2. **1 John 4:10** (ESV) —
  - a. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
- 3. In the gospel, God initiated redemption by his love and sent His grace in Jesus Christ

### III. **God’s grace for undeserving sinners**

- A. Rain would come for this desperate land
  - 1. But what would they have done to deserve it?
    - a. Absolutely nothing
    - b. The altars for Yahweh were in disrepair
      - (1) On Mt. Carmel and elsewhere
    - c. People were still committed to idolatry
    - d. Prophets of Baal everywhere
    - e. Prophets of Yahweh were either killed or hiding in caves
- B. That’s just the way God loves to work
  - 1. Provides grace for undeserving sinners
    - a. Even when we deserve the opposite and deserve judgment!
  - 2. **Romans 5:8** (ESV) —
    - a. 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
  - 3. **Ephesians 2:4–7** (ESV) —
    - a. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,
    - b. 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
    - c. 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
    - d. 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- C. Why does He work that way?
  - 1. **Ephesians 2:8–9** (ESV) —
    - a. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
    - b. 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
  - 2. No boasting
    - a. God gets all the glory
- D. These people didn’t deserve rain
  - 1. Israel – northern kingdom
    - a. Worst of the divided kingdoms (at least at this point in time)
    - b. Going more quickly and more passionately into idolatry
- E. But God in His mercy, showered (literally) these undeserving sinners with grace

### IV. **Sin rooted in idolatry**

- A. Sin is always rooted in idolatry

1. Human beings are by nature religious people
    - a. Even atheists are religious
  2. Everyone places something at the pinnacle of their value systems
    - a. Something is number 1
    - b. That something is the bottom line final answer for each person
    - c. That something is god
  3. Something must be god at the core of every human personality
- B. Paul's great description of the sinfulness of man
1. **Romans 1:18–25** (ESV) —
    - a. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
    - b. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.
    - c. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
    - d. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
    - e. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,
    - f. 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
    - g. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,
    - h. 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.
  2. Everything else in Romans 1 flows out of that fundamental idolatry
- C. Same is true in our age
1. Idolatry is still rampant; only the idols are different
  2. Today
    - a. Sex
    - b. Money
    - c. Power
    - d. Influence
    - e. Social status
    - f. Material possessions
    - g. Political movements
    - h. Personalities
    - i. Humanism
    - j. Planet
    - k. Self-righteousness
    - l. Self

3. All seek to be substitutes for God
- D. Redemption is designed to free us from the bondage of all these things
  1. Same is true in Elijah's day
    - a. These people need to be saved from their bondage to Baal
      - (1) Who can't speak
      - (2) Can't respond to even the most passionate prayers
      - (3) Who is completely impotent
    - b. But through a series of lies, has captured the affections of these lost people
  2. Elijah's redemption was designed to save them from bondage to these idols
- E. Likewise, the gospel is designed to free us from idolatry
  1. **Romans 6:5–11** (ESV) —
    - a. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
    - b. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.
    - c. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.
    - d. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
    - e. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.
    - f. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.
    - g. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.
  2. In Christ, idols are nothing to us anymore; died to them
    - a. So that we can live to Christ
  3. **Philippians 3:4–11** (ESV) —
    - a. 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:
    - b. 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;
    - c. 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
    - d. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
    - e. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
    - f. 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

- g. 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
    - h. 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
  - 4. Paul's primary idol – self-righteousness
    - a. But it was rubbish
    - b. Died to it to gain Christ
- F. God's grace in Christ frees us from our idolatry
  - 1. Just as Elijah's redemption freed Israel from their idolatry
- V. **World's best efforts are useless**
  - A. Comes as a result of Elijah's challenge to the prophets of Baal
    - 1. Give it your best shot!
  - B. They do indeed give it everything they have
    - 1. They pray
    - 2. They rave
    - 3. They cast themselves on the altar
    - 4. They cut themselves
  - C. They do everything they know how to do
    - 1. But if your idol is impotent, no amount of effort devoted to your idol will accomplish anything
  - D. NT
    - 1. **Jewish context – keeping the law**
      - a. **Galatians 2:15–16** (ESV) —
        - (1) 15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;
        - (2) 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ,
        - (3) so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.
    - 2. **Gentile context – law unto themselves**
      - a. **Romans 2:1–3** (ESV) —
        - (1) 1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.
        - (2) 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.
        - (3) 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?
      - b. Even the non-religious person has a moral framework by which he judges everyone
        - (1) But even that person can't fulfill his own law
      - c. **Romans 2:12** (ESV) —



- (1) 12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

- E. Our own day
  1. Education
  2. Politics
  3. Environmentalism
  4. Psychology
  5. Science
  6. All will be useless
    - a. As valuable as they might be in their own right, they cannot provide what we need for our redemption

- F. Best efforts of the world are useless for redemptive purposes

VI. **Sacrifice is necessary**

- A. Wasn't just any contest that God had Elijah engage
  1. Sacrifice was involved
- B. Animal sacrifice was significant to a Jew
  1. Leviticus 9 – fire came down from the Lord
    - a. Consuming the offerings of Aaron on behalf of the people
    - b. Offerings providing for the atonement of the people
- C. Fire coming down from the Lord indicated that God accepted the sacrifice
  1. That it was of the proper quality
  2. That is satisfied the requirements of the Law
- D. Same thing is true of the sacrifice of Christ
  1. Sacrifice of Christ was foreshadowed by OT sacrifices
  2. **Hebrews 9:11–14** (ESV) —
    - a. 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)
    - b. 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.
    - c. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh,
    - d. 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.
- E. Sacrifice is necessary for the gospel
  1. A perfect sacrifice
    - a. Made not by bulls and goats, but with a perfect person
      - (1) Jesus Christ
  2. A person who alone was qualified to make the sacrifice because He had committed no sin
- F. Not insignificant that the contest that God required involved a contest of sacrifices

1. Only one was sufficient for the circumstances
  - a. The one Elijah presented
- G. Same is true in the gospel
  1. Only one sacrifice is sufficient
- VII. **Decision is required**
  - A. The way Elijah began the engagement
    1. **“How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; if Baal follow him.”**
    2. If Yahweh is God, follow Him; if you like your idol better, follow him
      - a. But don’t sit on the fence
  - B. 60's slogan
    1. “Not to decide is to decide”
  - C. For Elijah they did decide
    1. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.”
  - D. By the same token, the gospel is only applied when a decision is made
    1. A decision that requires faith
      - a. Whom shall we trust?
      - b. Our idols? Or Christ?
  - E. That’s why all good evangelism leads to a point of decision
    1. **Hebrews 3:7–19** (ESV) —
      - a. 7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice,
      - b. 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,
      - c. 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.
      - d. 10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’
      - e. 11 As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ ”
      - f. 12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
      - g. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
      - h. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.
      - i. 15 As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”
      - j. 16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?
      - k. 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?
      - l. 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?
      - m. 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.
  - F. Do you believe? Do you trust Jesus alone for your salvation?

1. Today is the day of salvation
  2. Make your choice
  3. Don't hesitate between two opinions
  - G. A decision is required
    1. A decision of faith
      - a. Just as it was for Elijah's audience
- VIII. **Enemy is defeated**
- A. What happened to the prophets of Baal?
    1. They were all killed
  - B. We need to recognize, first, that we have an enemy
    1. Actually three
      - a. World, flesh and Devil
    2. But the Devil is the real enemy
      - a. He uses the world's temptations to entice our flesh to sin
  - C. Ultimately in the gospel, the Devil is defeated
    1. **Hebrews 2:14–15** (ESV) —
      - a. 14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,
      - b. 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.
    2. **John 12:31** (ESV) —
      - a. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.
    3. **1 John 3:8** (ESV) —
      - a. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.
  - D. Elijah defeated a great enemy to the people of Israel
    1. So in the gospel, Christ defeated the enemy
    2. **Christus Victor** – theologians describe the atoning work of Christ in these terms
  - E. Not only did Christ defeat Satan, He defeated the ultimate enemy – death
    1. **1 Corinthians 15:25–26** (ESV) —
      - a. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
      - b. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
  - F. Elijah was victorious
    1. Even more, Christ
- IX. Conclusion
- A. In the Elijah conquest, we see Christ, and the gospel, and the way God loves to work
    1. Work initiated by God's grace
    2. Provided grace for undeserving sinners
    3. Whose sin was rooted in idolatry
    4. When the best the world could offer was useless

5. Sacrifice was necessary
  6. Decision was required
  7. Enemy was defeated
- B. The Gospel According to Elijah