



Soham Baptist Church

Sermon Series 2011

“Elijah was a man just like us...”

(James 5:17)

Studies in the life of Elijah

The prophet Elijah appeared on the Old Testament stage during one of the darkest hours of Israel's history.

It had been some 58 years since Solomon had died and God's chosen nation had been torn in two. During that intervening time the Northern Kingdom which consisted of ten of the tribes of Israel had been ruled by no fewer than seven kings.

Without exception each had been as evil as the last; a point that is illustrated in the sadly repetitive refrain such as found in **1 Kings 15:25-26**.

Elijah comes onto the scene during the evil reign of Ahab. Not only had this king continued the spiral of godlessness set out by his predecessors, we read in 1 Kings 16:31 that he considered such action as 'trivial'.

On top of this Ahab made two personal decisions which brought about an ugly turn of events for the nation. We find these in 1 Kings 16:31. Firstly he married a heathen princess; something that was expressly forbidden by God. Jezebel proved to be a particularly evil and manipulative Queen and will feature strongly in the unfolding story of this passage of Israel's history. Secondly, Ahab began to serve and worship Baal and his consort Asherah; pagan gods who were worshipped by Jezebel's people back in Sidon.

The consequences of all this were somewhat inevitable. Within a short time anything approaching the pure worship of Israel's God had disappeared and idolatry became the norm. A temple to Baal was erected in Samaria and the priests of Baal took complete charge of the religious life of Israel.

1 Kings 16:33 sums up the legacy that Ahab would leave. And as if to add insult to injury it was on his watch that the city of Jericho was rebuilt contrary to God's express word and despite Joshua's warning back in Joshua 6:26.

This was open defiance of God and it is onto this stage that Elijah steps. Nothing is said of his family background or the details of his call to prophetic office. He does not appear to have any established reputation as a public or religious figure. His arrival on the scene is shrouded in mystery and is only surpassed by an even more mysterious departure some eight chapters later in 2 Kings 2!

Elijah stands before the King of Israel with a message of judgement from the God whom the King is defying and a call to turn back to the one true God and worship him only. **His story is told in a small section of scripture that takes us from 1 Kings 17 through to the middle of 2 Kings 2.**

However, the lessons of his life and ministry take us beyond the immediate moment of history. They are used to consolidate the continuity and faithfulness of God's covenant at the close of Old Testament history in Malachi 4:5. Here the prophet looks through 400 years of prophetic silence to the ministry of John the Baptist in the New Testament.

Elijah is used to illustrate the ministry of both John the Baptist and Christ himself in the Gospels, and then in short references contained in Romans 11 and James 5 that demonstrate a continuity of God's work through his people.

That story of Elijah still has a message for us today. We live in a dark world spiritually; a needy world where the boundaries God has set have been broken and where the voice of God needs to be heard.

Elijah's story is one of prayer, call, service, faith, providence, danger, despair and triumph. It speaks of the faithfulness of God but also the judgement of God. It is a call to true devotion for the people of God and a demonstration to those who deny him that God is still on the throne and is to be worshiped.

Underpinning this remarkable account stands a comment made by the New Testament writer James who tells us that "*Elijah was a man just like us...*" (James 5:17). May we in this preaching series find that we are men and women who can be just like Elijah!