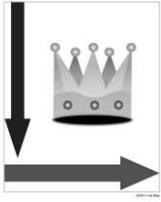


Week Twenty-four: Kingdom Power - 1 Kings 17:1-7; 18:20-46



Overview

The Divided Kingdom era is characterized by decline and apostasy. The kingdom of Judah has only four godly kings out of her twenty rulers, and the northern kingdom of Israel has none. In mercy, God does not abandon His people in either kingdom. During these dark days, He raises up prophets in both kingdoms. The southern kingdom

of Judah, where the Word of God and the Temple still hold sway, sees the rise of writing

prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. The northern kingdom rejects God's Word through the influence of Jeroboam, so the LORD selects two preaching prophets who perform miracles to draw God's people back again.

While the Bible teaches that miracles are true (God intervenes in His universe to suspend what men call the "laws of nature"), miracles are not as commonplace in Scripture as people think. Most of God's saints through the ages never saw a miracle; in fact, God's Word reveals only three periods with clusters of miracles (after creation itself). During the time of Moses, God reveals His power through the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the provision in the wilderness, and the destruction of Korah by opening the ground up. During the time of Jesus and the apostles, the Father authenticates His Son's ministry by miraculous signs so numerous that even the evangelists admit they cannot all be written down (John 20:30). During the period of the Divided Kingdom, God works through the prophets Elijah and Elisha to manifest His power in such a way that their works are compared to Jesus' ministry (Mark 8:28).

This lesson focuses on the story of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal to show God's miraculous power, a power displayed to bring revival and return to His people. God's purpose in manifesting His power is to call His people back to Himself and confirm His hand upon His prophets.

Lesson Objective:

Students who complete this lesson will observe that God manifests His mighty power both to unbelievers and believers so that they will confess His greatness and bow before Him.

Key Truths

One person of prayer, armed with the promises of God, can make a difference.

People are fickle and need godly believers to challenge them to obedience and faith.

God still desires to show His power through His people, to bring the hearts of those who have grown cold back to Him.

Lesson Outline

1. Declaration - 1 Kings 17:1-7

Elijah the prophet appears on the pages of Holy Scripture without any fanfare or introduction; he is from Tishbe, near Gilead, but we know neither his genealogy nor his call. He simply marches into the palace of king Ahab, a Baal-worshiper whose wickedness provokes “the LORD God of Israel to anger more than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). He is a praying prophet (as his successive stories show), so perhaps he has been praying for his nation. Perhaps he has prayed for revival, and God has now given him a promise to proclaim to Ahab. Perhaps he is claiming the promise the LORD gave to Solomon (2 Chron. 7:13-14), “When I shut up heaven and there is no rain . . . If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

He announces to Ahab in the middle of the rainy season (Israel, like many nations, has a rainy season where it rains almost daily, and a dry season where the rains come infrequently if at all), “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word” (17:1). The LORD immediately hides Elijah by the brook Cherith (a *wadi* that only flows during the rainy season) until the brook ceases to run from lack of rain (17:2-7). He feeds His servant miraculously by ravens who bring him food twice every day.

The LORD then sends Elijah to a widow in Sidon, where He once again manifests His power to provide by feeding Elijah, the widow, and her son with ground grain meal from a bin during Elijah’s entire sojourn. He stays with her until the Word of the LORD commands him to return to Ahab (a period of three years and six months—in the midst of the rainy season—Luke 4:25; James 5:17).

2. Confrontation - 1 Kings 18:20-40

At the right time, the LORD commands Elijah to go and confront Ahab, who is looking for him at the same time (18:1, 4-6). When the prophet meets the king, he calls him to gather the people and the prophets of the false gods Baal and Asherah to Mount Carmel. Elijah calls the people to cease living divided lives and to follow the LORD alone (18:21), but the people fail to answer. Elijah challenges the prophets to a contest on the mountain before the people. Both he and the false prophets will offer sacrifices of bulls—they will offer to Baal, and he to Yahweh—but they will not put fire on the wood; rather, they will pray and ask their god to answer, and “the God who answers by fire, He is God” (18:24).

Elijah calls Baal’s prophets to go first, and they call upon their god until noon, when Elijah begins to mock them, suggesting that their god is sleeping, traveling, or even in the bathroom (18:27). Though they cry out and cut themselves with knives all through the day until the time of the evening sacrifice, Baal never answers.

Elijah calls the people to himself to repair the altar of the LORD. He takes twelve stones “according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob,” and builds his altar in the name of the LORD. He places the sacrificial animal on the altar and commands that the water be poured on the altar (twelve water pots—once again reminding Israel of their common heritage as children of Yahweh). The water soaks through the wood and runs into a trench all around the altar. Over this thoroughly drenched altar he offers a simple prayer (thirty-one words in Hebrew—as opposed to the all-day prayers of the prophets of Baal), and fire falls from heaven to consume the altar, the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and even the water in the trench (18:38). The people immediately fall on their faces, declaring, “The LORD, He is God The LORD, He is God” Led by Elijah, the people execute the false prophets of Baal who had led the people astray from the true God.

3. Intercession - 1 Kings 18:41-46

This revival of the people’s hearts begins the possibility of return to God, but another obstacle hinders that return—the drought for which Elijah had prayed. He announces to Ahab that rain is coming, but goes himself up on the mountain to pray. Seven times he prays with his face on the ground, each time sending his servant to search the sky for rain. Six times the servant returns with heavy words, “There is nothing,” but the prophet simply returns to his knees and intercedes again. The effective, fervent prayer of one righteous man avails (James 5:16), for on the seventh trip, he announces, “There is a cloud, small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea” (18:44). Shortly afterward, “the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain” (18:45). God answers the prayer of His servant both for fire and for rain.

Application: What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin?

- God sometimes interrupts weather patterns to alert God’s people of their need to repent.
- People often live under adverse circumstances for a long time to avoid humbling themselves before God.
- Leaders who fail to fear God and walk in His ways influence entire nations toward idolatry and condemn them to judgment.
- God is better to man than he deserves; man is worse than he imagines.

Summary

God speaks to His servant by sending him to declare drought and rain to an ungodly king.

God acts by withholding rain, providing for the prophet, and sending fire and rain.

God reveals His power through drought and fire, and reveals His sovereignty by vanquishing other “gods” in the contest of the altars.

Discussion Questions

What prices might a person have to pay to see revival come to God's people?
When God prepares His people for revival, what might He do to get their attention?
People drift into apathy and complacency; how might God use one person to awaken them?