



"Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed."

—Alexander Pope

**10-Jan-20**

## **The Elijah Syndrome (Part Two)**

Last time, we saw that, even though [God](#) used the prophet Elijah powerfully in opposing the wickedness of Ahab and Jezebel, performing extraordinary miracles through him, the man's perspective gradually became more self-centered. He kept returning to the idea that "I alone am left," despite other prophets continuing to serve in Israel. His self-focus morphed into hopelessness—as well it should, for men cannot provide real hope. Despair is a sure sign that God has faded from a person's perspective. Rather than continuing to live the God-given life that he had soured on due to his dangerous circumstances, Elijah asked God to take his life.

After hunkering down in a mountain cave, he converses with God, at which point he says a second time, "I alone am left" ([I Kings 19:10](#)). The story continues in [I Kings 19:11-14](#):

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD WAS not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD WAS not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a

fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

God gives Elijah several miraculous displays of His power. He simply passed by, and a mighty windstorm dismantled part of the mountain and even broke the rocks. Then an earthquake struck, which would have amplified Elijah's feeling of the mountain coming apart around and beneath him. Then fire came from God Himself, just as fire from heaven had consumed the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. Yet the God of all creation was not *in* any of those things. He was their *source*, but His heart or intent was not *in* them because they were not the way He preferred to operate.

Without a doubt, God backed His prophet up when he called for miracles, yet in this demonstration, God reveals to Elijah that He favored a different approach. Another time, when men came to arrest Elijah, he called fire from heaven, and two groups of fifty-one men were burned up ([II Kings 1:9-12](#)). Another fifty-one would have been consumed by fire if God had not intervened to stop him (verses 13-15). In contrast, when a mob came to arrest Christ, He went with them peacefully, even though He could command legions of angels to annihilate whole armies of His enemies (see [Matthew 26:47-56](#); [Luke 22:47-53](#)).

When a Samaritan village rejected [Jesus](#), His disciples James and John wanted to do just what Elijah did—they suggested calling fire down from heaven to consume the whole village. Christ rebuked them, saying, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of" ([Luke 9:53-55](#)).

[I Kings 19:12](#) relates that a still, small voice followed the explosive display, implying that, contrary to His absence from the wind, earthquake, and fire, God was *in* the voice. Along these lines, Jesus identifies John the Baptist as "the Elijah to come" ([Matthew 11:14](#)). John was basically a voice—a voice crying in the wilderness; a voice that God used to prepare the way for His

Son; a voice without a single miracle to back it up ([John 10:41](#)). As the apostle Paul writes in [Romans 10:17](#), [faith](#) comes by *hearing*, not by witnessing mighty demonstrations of power.

Then again, God does display His destructive power at times, such as what He did to Sodom and Gomorrah when the time was right. When the time was right, He likewise decimated the empire of Egypt with extraordinary plagues. Yet He taught Elijah that He is not *in* excessive displays of power or showy miracles when a voice will suffice.

In verse 13, God again asks Elijah what he is doing there, and Elijah sticks to the same answer, saying a third time that he alone is left. God had given him opportunities—even encouragement—to change his mind, but the prophet is stuck on "repeat." Not even God's presence and teaching can move him toward a better frame of mind.

God does not force the issue—He takes this as Elijah's final answer. God then tells him to go anoint some people, including a prophet to take his place (verses 15-16). God also reveals that He had reserved seven thousand people who were faithful to Him, reminding Elijah that he was far from the only one left (verse 18). Perhaps God's command to anoint another prophet was both a mild rebuke and an assurance—a reminder that God was not limited to using Elijah, as well as a proof that His work would not end with Elijah's death. His myopia at this point kept him at the center of his own universe, resulting in God teaching him this sharp lesson.

Matthew includes a remarkable statement in his gospel. Jesus is in His hometown of Nazareth, where the people had known Him from an early age. The disciple writes, "[Jesus] did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief" ([Matthew 13:58](#)). The parallel account in [Mark 6:5](#) declares more pointedly that Christ "could do no mighty work there." The unbelief of the people limited the activity of God on their behalf. Elijah was not guilty to the same degree, but he had allowed an incorrect belief to take root—a belief that limited what God would do through him.

Something similar happened to [Moses](#), another extraordinary figure. The man who led Israel out of Egypt "was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" ([Numbers 12:3](#)). Yet, in a fit of frustration

with those Israelites, he neglected to hallow God when he said, "Must *we* bring water for you out of this rock?" ([Numbers 20:10](#); emphasis ours). God still performed the miracle and supported His prophet, but He was not *in* Moses' words and actions on that occasion. The work was still accomplished, but not in a way that God was *in*. Consequently, God prohibited Moses from completing his goal of entering the Land of Promise. He had the wrong mindset, ever so briefly, and it limited how far he could go.

Next time, we will consider more lessons from Elijah's spiritual nearsightedness.

- David C. Grabbe

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Hope to the End \(Part One\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

People everywhere seem frazzled, distressed, and terrified as a dark, evil, sinister force seems to be engulfing the world. The continued angst from dealing with this continual pathogenic zeitgeist threatens to render all of us into a state of hopelessness, apathy, depression, with absolutely no reason to ever expect a positive outcome. The church must forcefully deal with this overwhelming feeling of hopelessness or it too will succumb to this terrifying vortex of despair. We live in the same kind of cultural milieu as Noah before the world perished in the Great Flood. Over the past few centuries, and especially the last 70 or 80 years, the 'liberal', 'progressive' humanist philosophers and educators have successfully hi-jacked the minds of our populace, steering them totally clear from any reliance upon God by poisoning their minds with the patently illogical theory of evolution, forced upon unwary, naïve minds as fact and truth. The Day of Trumpets militates against this foolishness by restoring hope for the establishment of God's Kingdom which will permanently terminate decay, sin, and death. As God's called-out ones, we are fish swimming against a violent current, compelled to turn to God and keep His Commandments when the rest of the world rejects Him. As God gave the original Promised Land to Jacob's children, He

also gave the North American continent (largely virgin territory) to the descendants of Jacob. In 240 years, we have indulged in affluence, but forgetting its Provider.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Elements of Motivation \(Part Three\): Hope](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Hope conveys the idea of absolute certainty of future good, and that is exactly what the Bible tells us we have upon our calling and acceptance of God's way. John Ritenbaugh shows that, because the Father and Son are alive and active in their creation, our hope is sure!

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