

JUNE 17

You can see by the number of chapters we'll read about Elijah, that this time was very crucial and deciding for Israel. Actually the people of both Judah and Israel are looking on, not to mention people in the surrounding countries.

1 Kings 18

Vs. 1-6 It is interesting that it never says that there was a famine in Judah. Jehoshaphat was a very godly king in the line of David, and somehow his kingdom, just south of Samaria, didn't suffer the same damage. I wonder if this was a case of it raining on one side of the street and not on the other. That would have made the testimony of this event even clearer.

V. 4 This is not the same Obadiah who wrote Obadiah years later after the fall of Jerusalem, but he is a very good guy. Imagine the tension he must have lived under as a secret believer who was keeping the remnant of God's prophets alive in the northern kingdom.

Actually, Jezebel's influence was responsible for setting up Baal worship in Israel (1 Kings 16:31-32 and 18:19). In clearing the way for her brand of worship, she sought to exterminate everything that remained true to Yahweh. We'll find out later that there was a remnant of 7000 men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. That's not very many people among hundreds of thousands.

Vs. 7-16 Elijah knew it was time to meet Ahab because God had made this clear. Apparently for the past three years, there had been many "Elijah sightings" and God had swept Elijah away. Apparently some people had died as a result. In a way, this is kind of funny. Obadiah definitely wanted assurance from the Lord that Elijah would stay put and meet Ahab.

Vs. 17-19 You would have thought that everyone understood that the famine was God's doing, but here, the messenger was blamed.

Vs. 20-25 This event would have taken days or weeks to set up and to have everyone gather at the Mediterranean Sea, miles away from the city of Samaria. Mt. Carmel was thought to be the dwelling place of Baal. There were the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, Baal's girlfriend. So then, the 400 prophets of Asherah were the cheerleaders. Everything here would have been an advantage for Baal, if Baal had been real.

Vs. 26-29 The prophets of Baal had the first go. Baal's power, supposedly, was at its peak at noon. They finally stopped at about 3 p.m., making this a very bloody and very long six-hour ordeal.

Vs. 30-40 Notice the significance of Elijah rebuilding the altar of the Lord which had been destroyed.

The water that was used was from the Mediterranean Sea. There is a sense of quietness about what Elijah did here. There is no yelling and crying out by Elijah. Elijah's prayer showed he knew what God's purpose for him was. The prayer also showed that Elijah knew the Lord.

V. 39 It's hard to say what the total effect of this was on the people, but here they were awestruck and willing to see the prophets of Baal as fakes, and the people were willing to kill them under Elijah's direction. You wonder if the prophets of Asherah were also killed.

Vs. 41-46 Apparently in the planning for this event, Ahab made allowance for a festive "afterglow" and feast. You might wonder why Ahab went up to enjoy the feast and why he didn't feel defeated. I think it is because Ahab was a spiritually eclectic, wishy-washy man. I'll bet he was totally amazed at what God had done. It's interesting to me that the Gospels refer to King Herod as a man like this. He imprisoned John the Baptist, yet he was afraid of John and protected him from Herodias. He was perplexed when he listened to John in prison, yet repeatedly Herod was glad to have John called in to speak to him. Ahab was a similar lost, pseudo-spiritual guy

like Herod, fascinated by the spiritual and believing that Yahweh was real, just not convinced he needed to follow Him. I think there are lots of these kinds of people in the church.

V. 43 Elijah knew the cloud would come, but he persisted in prayer until it appeared. And look at how he prayed with all his body and all his soul. Elijah's persistence is God's lesson for us all.

V. 46 Elijah was given super human power to run these 25 miles, beating the chariot.

With all of this wonder and all of these signs, guess what happens next?

For us as disciples our hearts need to be focused on serving our Lord in the harvest as we follow, but not to be surprised by results or the lack of them. Surely some people had been moved to repentance by all of this, but not many. As we'll see tomorrow, Elijah might have had higher hopes and expectations.

Acts 11

Notice the *ears*.

Vs. 1-8 Now this council or trial was very important. God would use it to make some people face the fact that His Word and His offer of salvation in Christ was going out to all men. Remember earlier when it said that many of the priests became believers, well so did many Pharisees. Between those two groups, a party came into being in Jerusalem that became a threat to the mission of the church.

Vs. 2-3 Notice that these men didn't have any hesitation criticizing Peter. As former Pharisees, their education and social standing would have been better than Peter's, but God had intentionally given Peter an honored status through the signs and through the conversions of thousands that they couldn't touch. It was God's purpose, not Peter's faith or ability.

Vs. 4-10 Notice the detail Peter gives here. Anyone who knew Peter might have been interested by Peter's own objections and that God had to repeat this three times to convince Peter. I'm sure the stories of Peter's three denials and Jesus' three questions to Peter were very well known.

Vs. 11-18 Probably the most interesting thing here for me is what Peter says in v. 16. Peter apparently had a lot of exposure to John the Baptist, and as he saw the Spirit descending on Cornelius he must have had an "aha" moment.

V. 18 I was reading this morning that when Jesus answered the Pharisees and Herodians regarding paying taxes to Caesar, they marveled and were silent. Silence doesn't always mean that people are in agreement. When we get to chapter 21, we'll see that there are still problems in the Jerusalem church regarding following the law.

In all of what Peter says here, you see how beautifully and graciously God set this up. Not only did this happen to Peter, but it also happened to six other brothers of the circumcision party. Not only did God open the door to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, but He also did it in such a way that it sliced through any objections, saving the church from a possible division. God used Peter and now Peter's actions in Acts are almost finished.

Vs. 19-30 The center for outreach will now switch to Antioch.

V. 19 Notice that as they went out, the Christians only spoke to Jews. Doesn't that amaze you? As we read this it seems that this might have just been weeks after the birth of the church, but actually more than 10 years had passed since Pentecost. But God was working and setting up pockets of Christians that no one knew about.

V. 20 Again, it was the Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene (Barnabas was from Cyprus and remember Simon of Cyrene), who were open to speaking to non-Jews [Hellenists (or Greeks) is used to refer to all non-Jews], and many were saved.

Antioch was 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Eventually Peter would visit there, probably fleeing Jerusalem. Peter's future visit to Antioch is mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2:11. At this point

the church fathers in Jerusalem didn't want to send Peter and John, but Barnabas. Barnabas was well respected and he was used to dealing with Gentiles.

V. 22 The *ears* of Jerusalem may be a veiled criticism of the very conservative and narrow leadership that existed in the Jerusalem church.

V. 25 The words used indicate that Barnabas had to search and hunt down Paul. Barnabas apparently never fully lost contact with Paul over these 13 years but his exact location was unknown. His contact with Paul was good enough to know that Paul was gifted for this work. Not only that, Barnabas must have known from Paul's testimony, that Paul would be sent by the Lord into Gentile ministry. Or it could just be that the Spirit told him to get Paul, or all of the above. Paul was working in Asia Minor, preaching and traveling.

V. 26 Agabus isn't exactly known for good news. We'll see him again in 20 years in Acts 21.

V. 28 Finally we have a time reference. In Galatians 2:1 Paul says he returned to Jerusalem after 14 years. Claudius reigned from 41-54 A.D. So, if Jesus was crucified in 30 A.D. and Paul first visited Jerusalem 3 years after his conversion and now 14 years later, it might be 17 years since Jesus died and was raised, so around 47 A.D. This means that Paul had dropped out of sight for 13 years, working up in Asia Minor (Turkey), as he says, where no one knew him.

In Galatians, it says that Paul and Barnabas took Titus, a Greek, with them just to test the water, and no one required Titus to be circumcised.

Just like in the OT, we sometimes think things just happened without gaps of time. Even here, God prepared Paul in isolation. After Paul's conversion he disappeared for three years and returned to Damascus. Then after visiting Jerusalem, Paul disappeared for 13 years. Paul worked by himself, learning a skill, studying the Scripture, testing out all his arguments, preaching to people, getting over his past mistakes and overcoming his radical Jewish-ness, being prepared to become the apostle to the Gentiles. This didn't happen to him overnight.

Many times in the Bible, people God used, disciples included, were trained in adversity and in isolation. The isolation was not just the removal from ministry or people. It was a time of wrestling with God and self, and learning to depend on Him alone. Vision and personal mission are things which are formed in quietness and conviction. Sometimes being around people and in the stew of tolerance keeps firm convictions from forming. When Barnabas found Paul and mentored him for that year, he saw in Paul someone God had already prepared to do some mighty things. All Barnabas needed to do was what he did best, encourage this leader to lead in the harvest.

Psalm 135

It is interesting that the psalm begins and ends with the servants of God who serve God by serving the people.

Vs. 1-2 This is the song of the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem, encouraging the priests and Levites to rejoice and praise the Lord.

Vs. 3-4 They are to praise God because God chose Israel for His possession. The priests and Levites were leading worship for this possession of God.

Vs. 5-7 The priests and Levites are leading the worship for the God of creation. Isn't it interesting that this is the second time today that we've heard of a cloud rising at the end of the earth?

Vs. 8-12 They are leading the worship for the God who freed His people and humbled nations to give Israel this heritage and place to worship. What a privilege.

Vs. 13-14 The name of the Lord and His people are eternal and eternally honored. The priests and the Levites were leading worship in this eternal plan.

Vs. 15-18 They were representing the true God who had saved them from error and shown them what was true.

Vs. 19-21 This song seems to reach a peak here of joy and blessing and praise to the Lord. The priests and Levites should be honored to lead the worship for God, for His people and possession.

Proverbs 17:12-13

To meet a fool in the middle of his foolishness is dangerous. Not only is foolishness a hazard for others, but for the fool himself. I take it that a fool would return evil for good and so bring a curse on himself.