

## Session 1

July 25, 2021

### SERVE WITH COURAGE

#### 1 Kings 16:29-33; 17:1-6

The history of Israel is colorful, to say the least. By the time of Samuel, God's prophet and judge, the people of Israel were clamoring for a king (see 1 Sam. 8). Samuel warned them that kings required such things as servitude, and armies, and taxes. But the people persisted, and God relented. Only three kings (Saul, David, and Solomon) reigned over a unified kingdom, before civil war broke out and Israel was divided into two nations: Israel (to the north) and Judah (to the south). As near as I can decipher, both nations had 19 kings. While some in the southern kingdom of Judah were good and godly, *none* of the kings of Israel were good. In fact, the six kings leading up to Ahab left a legacy of violence, bloodshed, assassinations, murder, idolatry, immorality, conspiracy, deception, duplicity, drunkenness, suicide, and outright paganism! That was the mess that Elijah faced.

**A wretched ruler (16:29-33).** Back in verse 25, the Bible says that King Omri "did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did worse than all who were before him." Just when you think things can't get any worse, they do! Because all of the evil that Omri did was not only matched, but surpassed by his son, Ahab (v. 30). In introducing him, the text lists three specific sins that Ahab committed. First, was his *godless marriage*. The wicked woman that Ahab took as his queen came from a line of corrupt and murderous kings every bit as evil as the kings of Israel. Jezebel was so considered a filthy and evil woman that she is the namesake of the evil seductress mentioned in Revelation 2. What's more, King Ahab was a sniveling, spineless, weak man. As a result, the kingdom was Jezebel's to rule. Second, was Ahab's *sponsorship of idolatry* (vv. 31-33). To please his wife, Ahab erected various temples and high places for the worship of Baal. Third, in *violation of the curse* given by Joshua (see Josh. 6:26), Ahab allowed the rebuilding of the wasted city of Jericho. The sad result? "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him" (v. 33). For reflection: *Why do you think God allows evil leaders to rule over His people?*

**A courageous confrontation (17:1).** Then along came Elijah. His name means, "My God is the Lord." He is from the land of Tishbeh, a virtually unknown town near Gilead. Since Gilead was a rugged and barren land east of the Jordan, historians surmise that Elijah would have been a rugged, outdoorsy man, used to the wind and the wild. Later in the Bible he is described as cloaked with a mantle of rough hair and a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). This fits nicely with his New Testament counterpart, John the Baptist, who wore camel hair and a leather belt (see Matt. 3:4). The man of God approached the wicked king ruling the people of God and without so much as a bow and a greeting, declared: "As the Lord God of Israel lives, I stand before Him, and there will be no dew or rain during these years except by my command!" Everything Elijah said and did would have been offensive to King Ahab: *his name* ("My God is the Lord"); *his authority* ("As the Lord God of Israel lives"); *his posture* (he remained standing before the king); and *his prophecy* (who did this crazy man think he was?). For reflection: *What do think was Ahab's initial reaction to Elijah? How long do you think it was before Elijah became a "wanted" man?*

**A providential presence (17:2-6).** God's plan for Elijah included four specific instructions. First, "*Get away from here* and turn east," away from the King. Next, *hide in* and *drink from* the small stream called Cherith. Eventually Ahab would come looking for him. And eventually, Elijah would need the water! And finally, *let the ravens serve you*. For reflection: *Elijah was a rugged man from a barren land. He certainly could have found his own food and drink. Why do you think God told him to rest and refresh, and let the birds feed him?*