

These Are the Days of Elijah
1 Kings 17:1-7, 1 Kings 18:1-46

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The modern hymn, *Days of Elijah*, is quite popular today. However, as with so many of our hymns and choruses, it's often not the words which make it popular but the catchy tune.

Yet, it's not just the more modern hymns that fall prey to this. While the words to Charles Wesley's hymn "*And Can It Be*" are great, it wasn't the words responsible for its popularity, it was its catchy tune.

So, why has "*Days of Elijah*" been so popular among young people today? If an individual isn't familiar with the Bible, the song is meaningless since it makes use of a great deal of Biblical imagery.

Who was Elijah? What's so special about the way he proclaimed the Word of the Lord?

When we experience a great heat wave like we saw this past week, it's hardly a time of famine for us. When our military was involved in Iraq, was that really a time of the sword? What is the Year of Jubilee?

What about Ezekiel and dry bones becoming as flesh? Now you might know some of these things but maybe you don't recognize others.

Not only that but the author of this song actually gets a bit wrong. As far as I know Moses gave the people the law of God, so how could he be restoring anything, if it originated with him?

Or David rebuilding the temple of praise. As I remember it, God told David he wasn't to build the temple rather it was his son, Solomon, who built the temple never mind rebuilding it.

When I point this out, most people have never thought about it. Which makes me wonder if we really pay attention to the words we're singing or whether we just get carried away with the music.

This is why we're going to look at some of the imagery involved with this song over the next few weeks starting with the first line: *"These are the days of Elijah, declaring the word of the Lord."*

But, before we do that, let's look at the overall context of the song. Is there a theme running through this song or is it just a hodgepodge of Biblical imagery that has nothing to do with each?

Well, to set your mind at rest, there is a theme that's supposed to be running through the song. However, it appears that the writer got a bit mixed up between the verse and the chorus.

The verses talk about restoration and the working of God in our life and in our world even in the face of opposition, while the chorus talks about the return of Christ and the final setting up of God's kingdom.

So, when we finish this series, I pray you'll have an idea about what's going on, what the imagery means, and hopefully we'll pick up some ideas about how to get restoration, revival, and the kingdom of God established here and now.

As I said earlier, let's start at the beginning and see what we can learn about Elijah and declaring the word of the Lord.

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Who was Elijah? Well, to be honest, we don't really know. There are a few stories about him in 1st and 2nd Kings, but we know nothing of his background, where he came from, or who he was other than he was a prophet of God.

Was he rich or poor? A farmer or a priest? Was he related to the royal family that he often criticized? We just don't know.

He made his first appearance when he stalked into the presence of the notoriously wicked King Ahab and announced that God's judgement was about to fall in the form of a drought.

Then he confronted the prophets of Baal in a showdown to see which god could produce fire from heaven to light a sacrifice. Elijah won and had the prophets of Baal killed.

Then he had a crisis of faith and fled from Jezebel, the wife of Ahab. God comforted Elijah and then sent him to find his successor, Elisha.

To me, it would've made things much easier if he had found a successor with a more different name, like Bob, but God told Elijah to choose Elisha.

Next, we find Elijah confronting Ahab over the murder of Naboth, which Ahab orchestrated to get his hands on Naboth's vineyard. Ahab repented and Elijah announced God's forgiveness.

Then Elijah was given a message of judgement against King Ahaziah, where he again called down fire from heaven destroying the armies sent against him. Finally, he's taken bodily into heaven in a whirlwind.

Throughout his ministry Elijah was known for his willingness to publicly declare the Lord's will and judgement fearlessly in the face of great adversity.

We know he wasn't always as fearless as he sometimes appears, like when he ran from Jezebel, but that was more of an anomaly than the norm.

His ministry was marked by his declaration of the Word of the Lord to people who didn't want to hear it. He risked his own life to pass on the message that God had given him.

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So, what lessons can we learn for today about declaring the Word of the Lord.

In what sense are these the days of Elijah? In what sense are the days of Elijah parallel to ours, and in what sense do we need to take on the role of Elijah?

The first thing we should examine are the parallels between Elijah's time and ours.

In Elijah's time the King was a maniacal despot. He ruled wickedly purely for his own benefit, ignoring the needs of his people.

Regardless, Israel was God's chosen people and nation. The nation started out godly, but ever since they broke away from the southern two tribes of Judah, things had gone downhill.

The people had turned from God and the Kings had gradually gotten more wicked. Ahab, who was really cruel, was easily led by his more wicked wife, Jezebel.

Due to Jezebel, the people turned from the worship of the true God to the worship of the pagan god Baal, who, if you've ever watched Stargate SG1, you'll know was a Canaanite god.

Yet, it wasn't just the object of people's worship that changed but their behavior, too. Instead of obeying the law that God had laid down, they were sinning left, right, and center.

Like today, our country was founded on a belief in God. But now, people no longer seek Him, but pursue false religions, and follow false gods, political leaders, pleasure, and commercialism.

This is seen in many of our churches today where pastors have led their congregations into putting their faith in a politician rather than Jesus.

This decay within the church is also seen in the American Episcopal Church which appointed its first openly gay bishop.

In fact, Episcopal churches across the United States celebrated Pride Month this past June and ended the month with an LGBTQ+ interfaith worship service.

Not only this, but in some liberal churches, the Bible is rejected and substituted with other things instead of a relationship with God.

As we gaze around the Church in our country, we see it's not in a very good state. So, we need someone like Elijah to stand up and preach the truth, no matter what the consequence.

We need people who're willing to be like Elijah, who're willing to stand up and point out where we're going wrong and proclaim the standards of God.

We need somebody like Elijah who's willing to stand alone, if necessary, for the truth. We need somebody like Elijah who's willing to face down the worshippers and priests of the false gods and win.

We need people of dynamic faith so that when they pray, things happen: the rain stops, the rain starts, and the fire falls.

We need people like Elijah who're willing to tell about God's offer of repentance when people turn from their sins and seek Him.

These truly are the days when we need people like Elijah, but are these really the days of Elijah? Can such people be found, and if so, what message should they be preaching?

In 2003, there was an article about the appointment of the first openly gay bishop in the American Episcopal Church. Inside the same paper was an interesting editorial on the issue.

It was written by a self-confessed, gay agnostic, but what he had to say was a great challenge to the church.

He said that while he had expected to be on the side of those supporting gay rights, he found he couldn't in this case.

He said that the message of the church was based on the revelation of God's will in the Bible, and he could find no support for the appointment of gay bishops in the Bible.

He said that, while Jesus preached forgiveness and love, nowhere did He revise the morals of the Old Testament. His love was not a love that accepted any kind of sin.

Rather His love and forgiveness meant that it was never too late to repent and find forgiveness. He argued that if the church doesn't stand by the Bible, then what is it all about, nothing.

If the church is to remain what it's supposed to be, then it has to put what the Bible says first. It can't compromise or try to change its message to fit in with a new morality of the world.

It's different and it's meant to be different because it's founded on the idea of revelation, that God has told us how to live. The church is nothing if it does not stick to the teaching of scripture.

Of course, he then went on to suggest that the church would die if it stuck to this and he hoped for this, but that's irrelevant. His challenge to the church was to be the church, not a social club.

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This individual's challenge was valid. Our enemies sometimes grasp the meaning of Scripture and God's will quicker than we who are in the church.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Pharisees and priests often figured out what Jesus was saying before His disciples.

This is true because it's easy to academically look at a message that you don't have to apply, while it's hard to accept a message that you have to live.

When we get to the hard truths of the Bible, we don't understand them because we don't want to understand.

Now, I'm not saying that non-Christians get everything right about Christianity, but, since they don't have to live by the results, it makes it far easier for them to see the truth.

So, what does this have to do with us. The church's stand on homosexuality is not just an academic exercise.

Many churches have to deal with homosexual individuals, and they're in a quandary as to how they fit or don't fit into the church, but this is not a sermon to address that issue.

This is a sermon about the need for Elijahs; the need for people to speak the truth even when it's uncomfortable. Yet, it does shed some light on what the message is we should be proclaiming.

First, it's a reminder that the Bible is our standard of what is truth. This should be fairly obvious, but it has some implications that we tend to overlook.

It means that it's not the pastor that's the standard of truth. I've heard of people who have the attitude that if it was preached from the pulpit, it must be right. Well, as much as I'd like that to be the case, it's not true.

I do my best. I don't knowingly preach error, but I'm human. I make mistakes, I get things wrong. Hopefully, not too often, but I'm not the standard of truth, the Bible is.

That's why I try to preach what I think the Bible is saying so you can learn to study the Bible for yourselves to get the truth and test what I say.

It also means that tradition isn't the standard either, though tradition can be a good guide to a correct interpretation of Scripture.

It's good to know we stand in agreement with a long line of Biblical preachers all proclaiming the same message, but tradition isn't infallible either.

Martin Luther shook the church to its core when he found that church tradition had gotten the interpretation of Scripture substantially wrong, and the Protestant movement was born.

Also, it's not the forms of tradition that we should preach. There are some preachers or music ministers who seem to think that the way to reform the church is to sing only hymns written prior to the 19th century.

These are the same ones who believe in doing things the way we did 50-60 or more years ago. But it doesn't work. Times change. Tradition is not infallible.

The message is the truth of scripture. If we need to find new ways of expressing that truth, that's okay.

If we find ourselves in a new culture and we need to work out anew how that truth expresses itself in that new culture then that's okay too, missionaries do that all the time.

We need to remember that this is a different culture to what existed 50 years ago, but what we must never do is compromise the truth by twisting scripture to make it fit new fashions and new morals.

The truths of scripture stand uncompromised and must be expressed or the church isn't the church. We need Elijahs, people who preach the truth no matter the cost.

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There's also a second point, about the truth Elijah preached, that we can learn from that article I just quoted.

It's not just about preaching a message that's uncomfortable to hear, it's about preaching a message that's uncomfortable to preach.

Some people have difficulty with this because they don't like to upset anyone, but others don't mind upsetting people as long as the truth is preached and to be quite honest, some people need upsetting.

Many pastors don't like preaching a message on morality or that's uncomfortable to preach because it might force a change in them as well.

A message that's uncomfortable to preach might set us against others in the world or in the church.

A message like that might leave us like Elijah, alone and facing attack from all sides. A message that's unpopular.

That's what it means to declare the word of the Lord; to not compromise on truth even when it's uncomfortable for us.

There are many times when God has given me a message to preach that I wish He hadn't, but we're called to declare the Word of the Lord even when it hurts us.

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Conclusion

"These are the days of Elijah, declaring the word of the Lord."

God needs modern Elijahs. People who'll declare the truth of the Bible. People who won't compromise so as not to upset people. People who won't compromise to make it easier on themselves.

People who won't seek to preach tradition, the latest fad, or what everyone wants to hear. God needs people who'll faithfully declare the Word of the Lord.