One of the most beautiful places on earth is the coast of the Aegean Sea, which is a subdivision of the Mediterranean located between the mainland of Greece and western Turkey. There are 1,415 islands in the Aegean, which divide it up into several smaller sections, one of which is referred to as the Icarian Sea. It is the place where, according to ancient Greek mythology, Icarus made his fatal fall from the sky during his flight from the island of Crete. As the fictional tale goes, his father designed for Icarus a pair of wings made from wax and feathers. He warned young Icarus not to fly too close to the sun, nor too close to the sea. Yet when he was overcome by the thrill of flying, he soared higher into the sky and came too close to the sun, which melted the wax due to the heat. Icarus kept flapping his wings but soon realized he had no feathers left, and tragically plunged to his death in the sea. Hence, the Icarian Sea.

The Greeks often connected the story of Icarus to the tendency of man to become proud and overconfident. Pride is a serious vice!

In fact, pride is at the root of all sin. Solomon wrote:

**Proverbs 16:18 - “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”**

One cannot help but see how this is the case when reading through the books of 1-2 Kings. It was the pride of many of Israel’s kings that led to their downfall. In fact, even Solomon was blinded by pride as he multiplied wives for himself who turned his heart away from God.

The very things that Israel’s king was commanded not to do per Deuteronomy 17, Solomon did, as did those kings who came after him. The books of Kings tell us all about it.

Yet when kings became proud and the people drifted from the truth, the Lord was faithful to raise up a prophet to rebuke and call His wayward people to return to Him.
“Prophet” - *divine communication through human mediation*

The prophets were God’s spokesmen in the Old Testament. They were given the task of declaring the Word of the Lord to His people. They went against the grain.

Perhaps no prophet has received any more publicity than the one we are introduced to in our text—the prophet Elijah.

Elijah was among the greatest of all the prophets, serving as the gold standard of what a prophet ought to be and do. His spirit and power served as the standard by which all others after him were measured. His name was synonymous with spiritual fervor nearly 1,000 years after his time, and his fame surpassed even the most famous of Israel’s leaders.

The prophet Malachi could find no better symbol of the forerunner of the Messiah than to compare Him with Elijah:

*Malachi 4:5 - “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.”*

Some 400 years later, the angel Gabriel announced to the parents of John the Baptist:

*Luke 1:17 - “He will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah.”*

Elijah is a man who has gone down in history as a man who went against the grain, who swam upstream, who walked in one direction while everyone else went the other. His life is a faithful testimony of what it means to stand for truth when it has fallen out of popular appeal. For that reason, Elijah is a man to whom I am referring as a prophet for our time.

*Howard Hendricks* - “When God’s people slide into the ditch of conformity to their sinful surroundings, a man of Elijah’s bravado is required.”

Elijah appeared at a critical moment in Israel’s history. Idolatry and immorality were widespread. The altars devoted to the worship of God had been torn down, and the prophets were in hiding. Those who remained devoted to the Lord were a mere...
handful, scattered and intimidated by the scope of evil that surrounded them, and their existence was known only to God.

Like a flash of lighting on the pages of redemptive history, Elijah appears out of nowhere, boldly marches into the proud king’s court, and declares it is time to ‘drain the swamp.’

I want to draw your attention to three considerations as sort of an introduction to Elijah’s life and ministry.

1. **His CULTURAL context (16:29-34)**

Each of the prophets throughout the history of the Old Testament had their own unique context which served as the backdrop of their ministry. The spiritual climate of the culture must always be taken into consideration whenever you are studying the ministry of a prophet. For example, the prophet Samuel ministered to Israel in the days that led up to the establishment of the monarchy. The prophet Jonah was called to go to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital which just so happened to be the greatest threat facing Israel at the time. Understanding the prophet’s context is critical if you want to fully understand the prophet’s message.

What about Elijah’s context?

**Political context**

For more than 100 years, Israel had lived under the reign of three kings—Saul, David, and Solomon. After the death of Solomon, the nation is divided due to the foolishness of his son Rehoboam.

The ten northern tribes broke away from the house of David, while the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the Davidic house. The northern tribes became the northern kingdom of Israel, while the southern tribes became the southern kingdom of Judah.
From the time of the split until Israel’s eventual captivity, the northern kingdom had a total of 19 kings who were all corrupt to the core. The Bible says that they did “evil in the sight of the Lord.” It is an expression used over and over again.

The southern kingdom of Judah had 17 kings that spanned more than three centuries. Eight of these kings followed the Lord, while nine were wicked, much like their northern counterparts. In 722 B.C. the northern tribes were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians, never to return. This was God’s judgment on their idolatrous ways. The southern kingdom lasted longer, but were eventually overcome by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. After a period of 70 years, they began to return to Jerusalem from their captivity, though they remained under foreign influence and control all the way up until the time of Christ.

The role of the prophet was essential in the overall plan of God during Israel’s history. God called prophets to declare His Word to wicked kings and to His wayward people. As you can well imagine, the job of a prophet was tough. The prophet was not popular, and was often persecuted because of his message of rebuke and repentance.

When the split happened under King Rehoboam, we read in 1 Kings 12 that the northern tribes made a man by they name of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, their king. In order to maintain his power over the northern kingdom, Jeroboam introduced his own homemade religion to the Israelites.

He had the fear that:

12:26 - “And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord.’”

So he made two golden calves, placing one at Bethel and the other at Dan, and commanded the Israelites to worship them as their gods. Thus, it was Jeroboam who introduced idolatry to Israel in the formal sense.
For 22 years, he is king over the north. After he died, his son Nadab becomes king in his stead, and he is just as evil. He is only king for two years, however. He is assassinated by Baasha son of Ahijah.

When Baasha becomes king, he immediately kills anyone left over from the house of Jeroboam. He reigns over the northern kingdom for 24 years until his son, Elah, takes over and becomes king in his father’s place. Elah is king for only two years and is assassinated by his servant, Zimri.

When Zimri becomes king, he kills all the left over household of Baasha. Yet this guy is only king for a mere seven days. The people of the northern kingdom make Omri, the commander of the army, their king. In response, Zimri burns the palace down upon himself and commits suicide.

When Omri becomes king, there is a civil war that breaks out between those that want him as their king versus those who don’t. Omri wins and goes on to reign for 12 years over the northern kingdom. 1 Kings 16:24 says that Omri buys a hill upon which he builds a city, names it ‘Samaria,’ and makes it the new capital of Israel.

16:25 - “Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did more evil than all who were before him.”

When Omri dies, his son takes over and becomes king in his father’s place, and you know his name—Ahab. (see 1 Kings 16:29-35)

Bloodshed and assassinations, murder and mayhem, conspiracy and immorality. This describes the culture of the northern kingdom for six long, dark decades. The evil that begins with one man on the throne permeates throughout all the land, corrupting land and people.

When Ahab becomes king, he takes things to a whole new low! He exponentially multiplies the evil in Israel by marrying an evil woman named Jezebel who is the daughter of the king of the Sidonians. It is Ahab and Jezebel who introduce Baal worship to Israel and even make it the state religion.
Religious context

The first time that ‘Baal’ is mentioned in the Bible is in Numbers 22 and the chapters that follow. Baal worship originated with the Canaanites and had long existed in the areas surrounding Israel. Yet it didn’t really find its way into the hearts of the Israelites until it was formally introduced by Ahab and Jezebel.

What was Baal worship, and what was involved? Perverse!

Baal was worshiped as the storm god, the god of rain and fertility, seen as the one who was in control of the seasons and the harvest.

Baal was often worshiped along with his female consort, Asherah, who was seen as the goddess of good fortune. Ahab had an altar built for Baal as well as a pole for Asherah, and invited all of Israel to join he and Jezebel in their idolatry.

I have often wondered what made Baal worship so appealing to them. All throughout the OT, we read that Baal worship is a real temptation to Israel, from the time of Judges onward. Baal was a popular alternative to the worship of the Lord since the people were dependent upon the rain.

Why is this so? Keep in mind the fact that OT Israel is an agrarian society. As such, they were always dependent upon the weather for the success of their economy.

Canaanite religion worshiped Baal as the storm god. His female counterpart, Ashteroth, was worshiped as the goddess of fertility. The Canaanites believed that when Baal and Ashteroth were intimate, rain was sent upon the land. Thus, there was a system of ritual prostitution to elicit the gods. The whole system was unspeakably wicked and perverse.

Imagine how an Israelite man could be drawn to this!

Baal worship appealed to their flesh, to their emotions, and to their senses. It was something that they could see, touch, and taste. The worship of God was based on a
covenant that was written in a book, something that never strictly appeals to the senses.
It is a matter of faith and understanding that leads to convictional living.

Such faith goes against the grain of cultural gods that make their appeal to the desires of our flesh.

This is how idolatry always works. Idolatry always follows this same pathology:

Idols **entice** us— Idolatry takes a part of creation and makes it the ultimate source of security, identity, and satisfaction.

Idols **ensnare** us—The idol only makes you more miserable the more you give your heart to it. It is a vicious downward spiral. It fails to deliver on its promises. When its expectations are not met, it robs you of joy.

Idols **enslave** us— We become trapped. Whenever you make an idol out of something, it always binds you and makes you its slave. You absolutely have to have it, can't live without it, so you can't so say no to it.

This kind of thing is not something that is strictly reserved to an ancient culture, but is just as true of ours today. Make no mistake about it, false gods still make their appeal, but they go by different names.

**Tim Keller** - “Our contemporary society is not fundamentally different from these ancient ones. Each culture is dominated by its own set of idols. Each has its priesthoods and rituals. Each one has its shrines—whether office towers, spas and gyms, studios, or stadiums—where sacrifices must be made in order to procure the blessings of the good life and ward off disaster. What are the gods of beauty, power, money, and achievement but these same things that have assumed mythic proportions in our individual lives and in our society? We may not physically kneel before the statue of Aphrodite, but many young women today are driven into depression and eating disorders by an obsessive concern over their body image. We may not actually burn incense to Artemis, but when money and career are raised to cosmic proportions, we
perform a kind of child sacrifice, neglecting family and community to achieve a higher place in business and gain more wealth and prestige.”

It is against this cultural backdrop of idolatry and compromise and wickedness in high office that Elijah’s life shines forth.

2. His CONFRONTATIONAL style (17:1a)

“Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab…”

This is the first time that Elijah is mentioned in the Bible. What is interesting is that this is really all the background that we are given about him. There is no mention of whether or not he was married, and no mention of his age.

All we are told in the text is his name and where he was from.

The Hebrew word for ‘God’ in the Old Testament is the word ‘Elohim,’ which is occasionally abbreviated as ‘El.’ The word ‘jah’ is reference to ‘Yahweh,’ the covenant name for God. Between these two words is the small letter ‘I’ which has reference to the personal pronoun ‘my.’ When taken together, the name ‘Elijah’ means ‘God my Lord.’

“Elijah” - the Lord is my God

We are told that he is from ‘Tishbe,’ a small village in Gilead toward the northern part of Israel, east of the Jordan River. It was a rugged place, a remote and ‘out of the way’ kind of place. It was a wilderness kind of place, the ‘backwoods.’ Such a rugged landscape was sure to produce a rugged individual!

2 Kings 1:8 - “He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist.”

The same thing was said about John:

Matthew 3:4 - “Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.”
When churches are looking for spiritual leadership, they often begin with a man’s credentials. Elijah would have scared most pastor search committees to death! Think about it—he really didn’t have any credentials as far as credentials go. The Spirit of God on his life was really all that he had going for him, and that was enough.

Question: Where do we find confidence for life and service?

2 Corinthians 3:4-6 - “Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant.”

David Roper - “God surrounds Himself with incompetents. The people God uses have rarely been great people…He looks for misfits.”

Consider how confrontational all of this is. God raises up a weird prophet, someone who doesn't really fit in nor care to, a man whose name alone is a rebuke to His idolatrous people, and the Lord sends him to the epicenter of Israel’s apostasy—into the very throne room of Ahab himself.

Chuck Swindoll - “Onto this stage steps a prophet from nowhere. He follows no protocol, makes no introductions, offers no deference to the royal presence. He is without sophistication, polish, training, or courtly manners.”

Elijah is a man who dared to be different, whose life went against the cultural grain. When society around him was getting caught up in the worship of a false god, Elijah remained faithful to the Lord God. And he dared to speak up about it!

Later on in 1 Kings, Elijah is described as being ‘zealous’ for the Lord of Hosts. This simply means that the glory of God was foremost in his heart and mind. The honor of God’s name meant more to him than anything else did—more than his comfort, security, or reputation.
The devotion of his life is seen in contrast to the darkness of his times. I have heard it said that desperate times call for desperate measures. It took someone like Elijah to stand up and make a difference for God when no one else would.

3. His COURAGEOUS objective (17:1b)

“Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.’”

Elijah walks into the court of King Ahab and throws down the gauntlet. He wants everyone to know who the God of thunder and rain really is, and it ain’t Baal—it is the Lord, the one true God of Israel, the One ‘before whom I stand,’ he says.

So he declares to Ahab and his entourage that for the next few years, there will be no dew or rain except by his word. Drought would ensue, brought on by the people’s idolatrous ways. In fact, it was a promise fulfilled because according to God’s law, drought was the punishment for idolatry:

Deuteronomy 11:16-17 - “Be careful that you aren’t enticed to turn aside, worship, and bow down to other gods. Then the Lord’s anger will burn against you. He will close the sky, and there will be no rain; the land will not yield its produce, and you will perish quickly from the good land the Lord is giving you.”

God wanted His people to trust in Him alone for their needs, and this most certainly included the rain. Thus, Elijah is merely echoing what God had already said, but had long since been forgotten by His wayward people. He boldly takes his stand and proclaims the Word of the Lord. This is his objective.

I want to show you something that is amazing:

James 5:16-18 - “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain
Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”

James says that Elijah serves as an example of what it means to have an effective prayer life. According to James’ insight, Elijah had been in the prayer closet long before he showed up in the palace. (Notice where God sends him after the encounter!)

Elijah is a man of faith who understands:

• the priority of every word God has said
• the provision of daily bread
• the power of God to raise the dead

**Philip Ryken** - “The widow of Zarephath shows how faith in the living God is grounded in the factuality of the resurrection. Belief in the resurrection of the body isn’t just for super-Christians; it is the foundation for true faith. Resurrection is the proof of the promise of God.”

Elijah understood that there is hope beyond the grave for those who believe—our God raises the dead! (see (Luke 7:11-17)

Elijah stood for truth in a culture that had lost its way. His life was a radiant witness, a beacon of light in a spiritually dark day.

**Tony Merida** - “We live in a similar time, in which people worship a little bit of everything but not the living God exclusively—a little God, a little horoscope, a little TBN, a little pop psychology, a few conspiracy theories, New Ageism, naturalism, and more. They may want God at their death, but they live every day as functional naturalists or materialists. As a result of twisted theology, immorality is normalized in our day just like in the days of Elijah. He lived in a day like ours where people call evil ‘good’ and good ‘evil.’”

Lessons we learn from Elijah’s life:
• The gospel we preach is counter cultural

• Discipleship demands we be different

• We cannot be mediocre about our mission

Elijah is a prophet for our time. Desperate times call for some desperate men and women who are full of faith.

The church has a prophetic ministry in the sense that we are commissioned by Jesus Himself and empowered by His Spirit to declare the Word of the Lord to High Point and beyond. We are sent forth as bright lights to a dark and dying world, and our marching orders are clear—make disciples.

It will require courage and confidence on our part, but we are not alone in this mission.

There may be times in your life when you feel like you are standing alone, but remember that you are never alone. One greater than Elijah is with you, and His name is Jesus. This is our hope and the promise we cling to:

Matthew 28:20 - “Behold, I am with you always.”