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Faith: The Choice to Believe

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for...therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and protector of our faith..."

Hebrews 11:1-12:2

After the death of Solomon the history of the Kings of Israel becomes bleak. The nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms under Solomon's son and in the Northern Kingdom of Israel not one King chose to serve God until finally our Lord destroyed Israel allowing them to be overthrown and taken into captivity about 700 years before Christ.

In the Southern Kingdom of Judah things were not much better. With only a few exceptions, notably Hezekiah and Josiah, nearly all of the Judean Kings rejected God as well. Throughout these years before the final overthrow of God's people about 550 years before Jesus, God sent prophets to warn his people of their doom. For the most part the people of Israel ignored these messengers even going so far as to execute many of them.

Among these prophets were Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The content of their preaching and teaching as they served as God's spokesmen follows a similar pattern. Through his prophets, God convicts his people of their particular sins and warns them of their impending consequences, and then he nearly always adds a message of hope should the people repent and return to him. In many of the prophets that message of hope pointed toward the coming of God's Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

If Abraham is the 'father of the faithful' and Moses is the 'Law Giver', then Elijah is 'the Prophet'. He served God during the reign of one of the worst kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel named Ahab. Ahab, along with his wicked wife Jezebel, not only practiced every kind of evil themselves, but also lead their people to do the same.

Among the worst things they did was to lead God's people to worship a false god called Baal. Baal was supposedly the god of fertility who made the crops grow and the trees produce. Elijah's first prophecy to Ahab was a warning to repent or God would not let it rain in Israel for three years. Because Ahab refused to return to God his country suffered a severe drought.



After a time on the run from Ahab, Elijah returned and challenged the priests and prophets of Baal to a face-to-face competition with God to prove to all of the people who the real God was. This great battle between God and Baal is recorded in I Kings 18. In a show of his great power God defeated the prophets and priests of Baal at Mount Carmel. When the people saw the great power of God they turned back to him, but Ahab and Jezebel were not so easily swayed.

Jezebel put out a contract on Elijah's life and the prophet was forced to flee the country. Eventually God would call Elijah back to his ministry in Israel and eventually God would bring death and destruction on Ahab and Jesebel.

Throughout the period of the prophets this is perhaps the loudest message from God to his people. God expects his people, whether that be Israel or you and me, to be obedient to his commands. When God's people reject him and his direction then sooner or later he holds them, and us, absolutely accountable.

All of us tend to overlook this reality...that God hold his people accountable. We shouldn't. The stories of the prophets from Elijah to Malichi teach us that God will always hold his people accountable. We also learn from the prophets, that it is extremely difficult to drive God to the point of giving up on us. Even as he allowed both Israel and Judah to be overthrown and lead into captivity, God always gives the repentant faithful an opportunity to return to him.