



Where is the God of Elijah?

He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

(2 Kings 2:14, NIV)

Drought. It has been called *The Creeping Disaster*, because it always begins unnoticed. But as the grass withers, the streams dry up, and the baked earth cracks, people begin to notice as times of joyful harvest turn into days of dust and death.

Drought is prevalent in many places today, including my home country, the United States. We can explain drought through scientific means such as jet streams, wind currents, and global warming, but the Bible teaches that physical drought is often God's way of pointing his people to the greater reality of spiritual drought (See Deuteronomy, chapters 11 and 28, as well as 2 Chronicles 7:13-15). Unfortunately, spiritual drought often goes unnoticed by God's people who, due to the drought conditions in their churches and lives, no longer have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Thirsty Souls Drowning in Biblical Orthodoxy

Would it surprise you to learn that spiritual drought can exist in spite of an emphasis and interest in Bible teaching? Twenty first century churches are filled with evangelical Christians who are taught the Bible, but are spiritually dry. The words of the psalmist are the heart cry of many today, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." (Psalm 42:1, NIV)

A form of godliness without the power or reality of God is becoming the norm in the church today. Recently I came across a statistic indicating that eighty five percent of young people brought up in American churches leave the church. When asked why, the majority said that it was because they had never experienced God there.

The Days of Elijah

Almost three thousand years ago God's people in the nation of Israel were living in spiritual drought. They no longer recognized and experienced the living presence of God. Because of this, God brought physical drought to the land. Elijah was God's prophet who announced this coming drought. The story of Elijah is the story of a man who led God's people back into a living experience with God and His Word. This is why Elijah is known as Israel's greatest prophet.

Approximately eight hundred years after Elijah, John the Baptist came preaching and baptizing in the river Jordan. Interestingly, Elijah's earthly ministry came to an end in this same location. Even more significant, conditions in Israel in the times of John the Baptist were identical to those in Elijah's day. The last prophet, Malachi, had spoken the word of God four hundred years previous to John. There was no lack of scribes and Bible teachers in Israel, but the people were experiencing spiritual drought once again and, significantly, the nation was once again experiencing physical drought.

For this reason, Israel came to believe that Elijah would return just prior to the coming of Messiah who would restore the fullness of God's presence and establish his kingdom among the people. This is why John the Baptist was said to come in the spirit and power of Elijah as he prepared the way for Jesus. In fact, our Lord said that for those who were willing to accept it, John was the Elijah to come (Matthew 11:14). And he was, for like Elijah, John prepared God' people to receive the presence of his living Word (See John, Chapter One).

The Legacy of Elijah

When we think of Elijah, most of us call to mind the events of the first three and one half years of his ministry – The miraculous provision by ravens or the widow of Zarephath's son who Elijah raised from the dead. Of course, the fire that fell from heaven and the defeat of the false prophets of Baal is the most prominent image that comes to mind. But these things are not the real mark of Elijah's ministry. It was the ten years the prophet spent after these events that are most significant. For it was during this time that Elijah invested his life in teaching others how to experience God's presence and hear God's voice themselves. This is the legacy of Elijah known as the Schools of the Prophets.

Where is the God of Elijah?

Among those in who Elijah invested his life was the man to whom he would pass the mantle of leadership, Elisha. He was Elijah's constant companion for a decade. Finally the day came when God called his prophet Elijah home, and Elisha was there beside him. The story is found in 2 Kings 2: 1-13. Three things stand out.

First we see Elisha's *persistence*. Repeatedly, he refuses Elijah's suggestion to stay behind as he journeys toward the Jordan where God will send the fiery chariot to usher the prophet into his presence. What is the significance of this? Simply this – God is looking for people who will seek him with all their hearts. People who desire him so badly that they refuse to prioritize comfort over pain, endurance over rest, and life in this world over rich spiritual life that God offers to those who seek first His kingdom. The question that God is asking all of us is this – How badly do you want me?

The second thing that stands out in this story is the ability of Elisha and the other prophets to *hear God for themselves*. It was Elijah's last day on earth and God had made this clear to him, but he had told no one. Nevertheless all the other prophets knew. This must have been especially encouraging to Elijah as he realized that his disciples were now experiencing God's living Word for themselves. As a side note, it is significant that only Elisha was at peace with this knowledge. The other prophets struggled with it. It's one thing to hear God. It's another thing to receive His Word and walk with a peace and confidence from knowing that God is in control.

Finally, we see in this story the *passing of the mantle*. Elijah's cloak falls from his shoulders as he is carried away by God's fiery chariot. The mantle has now fallen to Elisha and what does he do? He returns to the Jordan, where moments before Elijah had parted the water with his mantle, and as he strikes the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah he cries out, "Where is the God of Elijah?" Was it a question or a declaration of faith? Think about it. Either way, we now see that Elijah's work is accomplished – his was a ministry of teaching others to know and experience God's power in their own lives. The spiritual mantle has been passed.

In these days of spiritual drought the church needs men and women who thirst for God. Men and women who recognize the spiritual drought that exists among the people of God and who realize that the church needs more than the cracked cisterns that come from making Bible knowledge the end all of discipleship. (See Jeremiah 2:13) These are the ones from whom rivers of living water will flow, watering the lives of others, and bringing an end to the days of dust and death in which we find the church today.

Think About It

Reflect on the following questions, writing down and saving your answers. Journaling is a great way to help mark our progress as we grow in our ability to hear and experience God.

1. Do you believe that it is possible for an emphasis on Bible teaching to exist in the church even during times of spiritual drought? Why or Why not?
2. Do the words of Psalm 42:1-2 describe you? Do you feel there is more to the Christian life than you are presently experiencing?
3. What can parents do to keep their children from becoming part of the 85% who never experience God during their days attending church?
4. How badly do you want God? What are you willing to do, give up, or sacrifice to find him? Is it right for God to test our degree of desire for him?
5. Who do you know and respect that can help you to experience God more powerfully in your life? If the answer is “no one” are you willing to pray and seek a mentor?