

"My God is Yahweh"

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn then again to the passage we read, 1 Kings chapter 16 verse 29 to chapter 17 and verse 1. Have you ever found yourself watching the news and think to yourself or end up thinking to yourself, it can't get any worse than this? Things can't get worse than this.

Do you ever find yourself thinking that? Surely it can't get any worse than this. And that's normally not just due to the events but the way in which they're portrayed by the news.

I have to say as a former newsman, I can plead guilty to the sort of exaggeration or the desire to paint things in a more dramatic way because it might grab more attention.

But we maybe have all been watching the news at one time or another and be thinking, well, can things get any worse? And what this passage tells us is, yes, they can.

We often find ourselves thinking, it's never been as bad as this and it surely can't get any worse. But reading about Ahab's reign in this passage of 1 Kings, that tells us that things can indeed still get much worse because things had not been going well in Israel prior to this.

[1 : 3 9] In fact, the history of Israel, that is the northern kingdom because Israel had been split apart tragically after the reign of Solomon into two kingdoms and the majority of the tribes, ten tribes became this northern kingdom which became known as Israel later Samaria because of the capital Samaria and a southern kingdom Judah which was made up only of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin with its capital Jerusalem and so this is the northern kingdom and things really hadn't been going well in the northern kingdom from the get-go from the time of Jeroboam he had set up a golden calf so reminiscent of a golden bull so reminiscent of the calf made by Aaron at the foot of Mount Sinai when the children of Israel were liberated from Egypt so things had not gone well they were breaking the second commandment they were making images and worshipping them there were a succession of evil kings and in fact what you read in the book of the kings is that whilst in Judah the story is not brilliant but sometimes there's a good king there's a kind of summary as to whether that king did well or not whether they did evil in the sight of the Lord or not and in Judah there are some good kings but in Israel it's one bad king after another and so people at this time might have been thinking well can things get any worse and the answer was they sure can they sure can because Ahab ratchets up the level of evil in Israel to unprecedented levels because he really gets on board with

Baal worship or Baal is how you might say it but we'll call him Baal for ease of use Baal was an idol a rival god a god of the Canaanites and boy did Ahab get on board with Baal worship as we read in verse 31 that's how this idea of the fact that he did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him is really spelled out in the following verses firstly he considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat that is what he'd already set up in the way of false worship but then he decided well let's go the whole hog he married Jezebel daughter of Ethbal king of the Sidonians and began to serve Baal and worship him so that is Jezebel's god and the god of her father

Jeroboam doesn't want to be unequally yoked shall we say and decides he's going to go all in with Baal as well and so he begins to serve Baal and worship him and not only that he sets up an altar for Baal and he has a temple of Baal that he built in Samaria what you can see in the cases of some kings is they have divided loyalties you know they do in some ways recognize the Lord the God of Israel but they're also straying and worshipping other gods not Ahab he has an undivided heart in the wrong way he's all about Baal Ahab also made an Asherah pole that is some kind of image and did more to provoke the Lord the God of Israel to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him so he's really outstanding isn't he he's a standout king for all the wrong reasons because he has gone hook, line and sinker for this false god and Baal was in many respects however way you might want to go into detail as to what sort of idol he was he was really a fertility god you know responsible for the rains that would bring that would cause the earth to yield its harvest and so forth but also provide people with children or so they so his followers believed and so that's the state of affairs in Israel at this time just when people were thinking can it get any worse yes it normally did but what we see here is for such evil days and that's what this passage is telling us the days are evil when the days are evil

God's cause will not be neglected either God will not leave himself without a witness God's defense against those who do evil is ready he's not unaware of the evil that's going on and he's not just standing back impassively not caring about it either we see there he provoked the Lord to anger the Lord's not unaware of this and he's going to do something about it it's a great assurance that when the days are evil the defense is ready when those who oppose God and in this case are turning away from God completely wholeheartedly well cometh the hour cometh the man God will not leave himself without a witness and he will defend his cause through that witness it's helpful for us to remember that God knows what we're going through these verses are recorded to tell us yes that Ahab did all this evil and to put him in if you like in this hall of infamy to go down in history as one who was a traitor to the

Lord so that his name would be a byword for all that is bad but also to help us to remember that the Lord was provoked to anger by this the Lord was not going to let this slide God is just and is mindful of injustices that are going on and that's a comfort to us isn't it when we see in many ways this nation in so many respects turning away really wholeheartedly from the faith of its fathers you know the land of the book and so forth we can remember that God is not unaware of that and for those who still do call upon the name of the Lord he is mindful of the fact that we dwell in the midst of this remember what Jesus said to the believers in Pergamum

[9 : 32] I know where you dwell I know where you dwell near Satan where Satan has his throne yes even in dark days when the days are evil God knows where his people dwell and God will not simply let it slide or it's not that God simply doesn't care about what's going on so yes what we find out here is that the days are evil and we see in response to the provocation that Ahab has so brazenly so blatantly done to God to the Lord the God of Israel because Ahab's the king of Israel and he's turned his back on the God of Israel we read there that he clearly or in his day under his government he else of Bethel has rebuilt

Jericho and the problem with rebuilding Jericho is you're not supposed to rebuild Jericho because Joshua in Joshua chapter 6 and verse 26 after the fall of Jericho because it was divinely toppled Jericho you see and so it had to remain unfortified as a witness to the fact that God had done this Joshua laid an oath on them at that time saying cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city Jericho at the cost of his first born shall he lay its foundation and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates so that is clearly what is come to pass is a fulfillment of a curse that Joshua or that the Lord has said by Joshua that again it's an example of the flagrant disregard

Ahab has for the word of God yes Joshua said that but who cares let's rebuild Jericho anyway we don't what it says is we don't really believe the Lord exists you know or his words empty his threats are empty so let's go and rebuild Jericho anyway and what has happened is it has been at the cost of Hiel's youngest son Segub and at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram at the beginning the foundations at the beginning of the project as a warning Abiram would have died and then at the very end of the process setting up its gates at the end of the fortification process Segub dies as well this is God by way of if you like the first warning shot saying you are sorely mistaken

Ahab the Lord lives this is the God of Israel and his word he surely will perform as a warning to say you are in grave danger but then we find the arrival on the scene in chapter 17 and verse 1 of Elijah and this is the one whose life we'll be God willing looking at over the coming evenings now Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead there he is he just appears doesn't he it's a sudden appearance again I think to show that the Lord is not slow in showing Ahab that he's not just letting this slide that it's not something he's indifferent about but rather suddenly there's someone on the scene and this someone on the scene is

Elijah and that's the first thing to notice about him it's his name so Ahab's gone wholeheartedly for Baal and he's obviously leading the whole of Israel in his wake to go for Baal not the God of Israel he's saying worship Baal worship Baal our God is Baal and on comes the scene one whose name is my God is Yahweh yet his own name is my God is Yahweh and that's the one who God sends to Ahab the one who says my God is Baal his name is a challenge as if to say my God is Yahweh who's yours choose today who you will serve because my God is

[15 : 05] Yahweh that's what Elijah means my God is Yah my God is Yahweh the God of Israel when we see it in the text of our Old Testaments it's normally the Lord with capital letters but that's that's a habit that comes from the Jews of later years far far later years being not willing to transcribe the sacred name of God himself his own name Yahweh but that's what the words are it is Yahweh there are various titles that God has in the Old Testament the Lord Adonai El Shaddai the Almighty and so forth but Yahweh is his name it's not his title that's the name that's revealed to Moses through the burning bush I am who I am and that's what Elijah's name is even when the days are at their darkest

God will not leave himself without a witness and suddenly on the scene comes Elijah so often when we hear of a prophet coming on the scene there's a story about the call of that prophet now there was in Gilead and Tishbe a man of God named Elijah and the word of God came to Elijah and said arise Elijah go to Samaria and to Ahab king of Israel and tell him thus but no not here dark days require an immediate response a lightning response all of a sudden here's this prophet in Ahab's face apropos of nothing whose name is my God is Yahweh and he is indeed not some ordinary private individual he's a prophet he's a prophet what is a prophet what is a prophet in the Old Testament well we can put it simply maybe simplistically but it gets to the gist of it a prophet is one who is divinely commissioned to speak

God's word to God's people especially their leaders to remind them of their covenant obligations to remind them of the fact that they're in a covenant with God that they've made vows before God that they've committed themselves to God and that therefore they are to be faithful to the covenant they speak for God as opposed to a priest who speaks who represents the people before God they come into God's presence on behalf of the people the prophet comes into the presence of the people on behalf of God you see how the prophet functions and they are there to remind faithless leaders and those who go astray to return to the covenant and to the God of the covenant

Yahweh to the Lord himself if you like a covenant is like a marriage and it's often portrayed in that way in the Old Testament scriptures and particularly you'll see that particular prophets use that language the Lord has wedded himself to his people and the people are being unfaithful they're being adulterous and so the prophet acts like a divorce lawyer saying you have been unfaithful so you could say that prophets are covenant lawyers they come to make the case for the prosecution against unfaithful leaders and unfaithful followers of those leaders and to hold them to account and say warning them so often and in so many different ways if this continues expect judgment so we see that

God has left himself not left himself without a witness in these dark days he's brought forth Elijah one who tells us that he's a witness in his name Elijah in his office he's a prophet and that means he is going to hold Ahab to account for his violation of the covenant but he will also show that he is a witness through his words what does Elijah say to Ahab as the Lord or as Yahweh the God of Israel yes a reminder you might say Baal's the God of Israel I'm telling you right now my God is Yahweh and the Lord the God of Israel lives you see how he says that too as the Lord the God of Israel lives what a confession of faith that is what a statement you are so wrong Ahab the Lord is the

[20 : 41] God of Israel and he is the one who lives this is the beginning of the challenge which we'll see throughout Elijah's life who is the real God Yahweh or Baal we'll see that coming through in the different episodes of Elijah's life and here comes that initial challenge as the Lord the God of Israel lives whom I serve again it's a it's a provocation to Ahab whom I serve you certainly don't serve him you're serving Baal you're bowing down to a false God you're bowing down to an abomination I serve Yahweh as the Lord the God of Israel lives whom I serve there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word so Ahab might have been thinking well my

Baal plan is going brilliantly he reigned a long time didn't he we read in verse 29 he reigned for 22 years and that's quite a while for a king of Israel that may have given him a false sense of security some kings of Israel only reigned for a week you should check out Zimri for how not to be a king he lasted a week and he burned down his palace with him inside it at the end of it not exactly a way to govern but 22 years Ahab we don't know how long he'd been reigning at this point but he's certainly been reigning a while because he's managed to set up all this Baal worship hasn't he so it's a while he might have been thinking this is all going swimmingly and where's Yahweh the so-called God of Israel during this Baal's prospering me he must be real he must be the one with the power but little does he know he's been provoking the

Lord as it says in verse 33 and now here it comes confronting him all at once there's this guy from across the Jordan from Gilead whose name is my God is Yahweh saying as Yahweh the God of Israel lives whom I serve there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word what's that challenging!

Yes this fertility God who's supposedly blessing us with all this rain and fertility Elijah is saying you want to bet and again it's covenant that Elijah is bringing up here because in Deuteronomy and in other places Deuteronomy chapter 11 and verses 16 and 17 we read this take care lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them yes this this always this danger of your heart being deceived and being turned aside to worship other gods and worshiping them then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit and you will perish quickly off the good land that the

Lord is giving you if you worship idols be sure I will shut the heavens Ahab through Elijah there's going to be no rain then you'll see if Ahab is the one who's delivering your rain or not it's a challenge a confrontation a rebuke to say let's just see who the God of Israel really is let's just see who has power over the rain or not and it's a powerful powerful witness to the fact that however things may seem and it seems like there's seemingly great forces that are deeply anti-God at work in not just in our land but throughout the West and in many other parts of the world as well powerful forces they appear to be strong as with

[25 : 28] Ahab's reign it may be looked to many people who were then tempted to follow him well yes where is the God of Israel let's follow Baal it seems that he is blessing us and it would seem to if he's not if the God of Israel is not doing anything let's just bow down to Baal we see there that they may seem!

but from what Elijah is saying here it's God the God of Israel even in these dark days who's going to demonstrate he's the one with power and so we dare not bow down to Baal then do we and there are many ways in which we are induced to do that by the culture of our day it would be hard even just to rhyme off a list of the unbiblical directions we're taking as a nation as the west in these days and yet we are told God has his defence ready we are to side with him we are to be with Elijah and say my God is Yahweh or my God is the triune God Father Son and Holy Spirit my Saviour is Jesus Christ

Christ is my Lord not the bales of our current culture as one commentator really beautifully put it for to see Elijah appear so suddenly reminds us that we need not despair when we see great movements of evil achieving spectacular success on this earth for we may be sure that God in unexpected places has already secretly prepared his counter movement God has always his ways of working underground to undermine the stability of evil God can raise up men for his service from nowhere therefore the situation is never hopeless where God is concerned whenever evil flourishes it is always a superficial flourish for at the height of the triumph of evil God will be there ready with his man and his movement and his plans to ensure that his own cause will never fail and it is indeed the

Lord Jesus Christ who says I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it it looks here in this passage in Kings that Satan himself!

has taken the throne in who has said not so you will not prevail my God will prevail our saviour will prevail we can get very used to the idea that this is the day of small things in our day in this land well who says so who says that God cannot raise up his witnesses in this day and that we would see days of great power demonstrated against the gods of this age the false gods of this age as God raises up his own witnesses That he has his defense always ready for his cause!

[29 : 04] Now we might think well I'm not Elijah Do know what James said the brother of the Lord in his letter Elijah was a man like!

when he's demonstrating how prayer can be so powerful James uses the example of Elijah saying he was a man like us and he also sheds light on the fact that this drought that would come was a result of Elijah's fervent prayer to God that's not told as here but it is shown in the letter of James he had been praying that the heavens would be closed so that people would see that it was God who had the power so that people would know that the God of Israel lived it's an encouragement to us to remember God is not going to leave himself without a witness in these days and we are to be on our knees praying that he would indeed reveal from heaven his power and also that he may indeed use us for

Elijah was a man like us that he would use us in these days as his witnesses and that we would by his grace and by the empowering of his spirit hold fast to the truth the truth of God's word the truth of the gospel the truth of the fact that there is no other way to God but by Jesus Christ all entirely unfashionable in these the days of Ahab in Scotland but nevertheless we side with Elijah and we say my God is Yahweh now as we are reminded that the days were evil but God always has his defense at the ready we see of course God working that supremely in Christ Jesus our Lord the days were evil were they not

God's people were being oppressed! by Roman occupiers and so many of them were dispersed across the land and they were despairing we read only of a faithful few like Simeon and the temple waiting for the redemption of Israel!

The voice of God it seemed had been silent for centuries! What is going to become of us? What is going to become of God's cause?

[32 : 01] And then boom! Out of nowhere as it seems comes one in the power of Elijah saying prepare the way for the Lord and then in his wake comes the Lord himself not just one who is my God is Yahweh Yahweh in the flesh himself come to save his people in the power of the Holy Spirit and he did it through his life his death and his glorious resurrection demonstrating that God has surely not left himself without a witness he demonstrated to all to all men but not also to all men to all the powers of evil that he is the victor that he is the king God's rightful king and he will reign forever over God's restored people and he's the one who calls us to loyalty and full allegiance to him tonight that we may put our trust in him if we are found to be worshippers of

Baal on the great day it won't go well for us and so the question before us tonight is choose today who you will serve there's no neutrality in this world you either serve the Lord or you serve Baal or his like and therefore if you haven't come to Christ tonight you're invited to do so wholeheartedly to say with Elijah you are my God and I serve you and no other