

Foundations Devotional

• FOR THE WEEK OF DEC 20 - DEC 26 •

MONDAY // 1 KINGS 16:29-34; 17

First Kings catalogs a long list of kings of Israel and Judah. The evils of the kings of the divided kingdom climaxed with the rule of Ahab. First Kings 16:31 tells us that the sins of previous kings were trivial compared to Ahab's, which included worshipping Baal, building temples and altars to Baal, and marrying a priestess of Baal. As great as Ahab's sins were, the worst part was that he committed them while leading a nation, which means he led Israel down the same path. No wonder God was angry. It was into this darkness the Lord sent His prophet Elijah to proclaim the truth and judgment of God upon His people in a call for their repentance. Even amid some of Israel's darkest days, the Lord sent a light to His people and offered them a way out. He has done the same for us today through the light of the gospel.

TUESDAY // 1 KINGS 18-19

First Kings 18-19 describe some of the highs and lows of Elijah's ministry. God gave Elijah the responsibility to confront the idolatry in the land, so Elijah assembled Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel for a contest between God and Baal. Identical sacrifices were prepared and the deity who would send fire to consume His sacrifice would show Israel whom to worship. The prophets of Baal tried all day to coax their god to send fire, but nothing happened. After Elijah offered a simple prayer, God responded with fire, causing the people to recognize the power of the one true God. The events on the mountain enraged Jezebel, and she threatened to kill Elijah. He was forced to flee into the wilderness where he thought he would die. From his place of fear and hiding, though, Elijah listened to the quiet voice of the Lord, who reminded him of his calling and encouraged him to continue in his ministry. We all face challenges similar to the one Elijah presented on Mount Carmel and faced for himself in the wilderness. Will we choose God to be Lord of our lives, or will we be content to rely on our own abilities and resources? When we accept Christ as Savior, we still face daily choices of whether to seek and follow the Lord's guidance and to rely on His strength or to seek and rely on our own.

WEDNESDAY // 1 KINGS 21-22

The Book of 1 Kings closes with a picture of the full extent of Ahab's evil and the incomparable grace and mercy of God. Ahab desired the vineyard of a man named Naboth, but Naboth refused to sell it to him. As a result, Jezebel devised a plan to accuse Naboth falsely and have him stoned to death. After Naboth's death, Elijah condemned Ahab. The prophet said that the king's family would come to a disastrous end and that he and Jezebel would die violent deaths. That news led Ahab to do something he had never done before—repent of his sins and humble himself before God. With that demonstration of repentance, God postponed the family's destruction until after Ahab's death—an action that shows no one is outside the reach of God's grace and mercy. A few years later, Ahab asked King Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in a war, but Jehoshaphat insisted on first hearing from God's prophets. While Jehoshaphat was well-intentioned, neither he nor Ahab listened to God's prophet Micaiah, who warned of defeat, and Ahab died in battle. From this story, it is Micaiah alone who stands out as an example of godly character, despite the love and grace God had shown Ahab. Micaiah's example reminds us that only by being transformed by faith in Christ are we able to understand God's will and receive the strength to stand firm on God's Word in the face of the world's pressures.

THURSDAY // 2 KINGS 2

The Book of 2 Kings picks up the story of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms where it left off at the end of 1 Kings. The first five chapters, however, focus on the ministry of the prophets, especially the transition from Elijah to his successor, Elisha. In chapter 2, we read of Elijah's exit from earth by being taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Elisha asked for and received a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit. After Elijah was gone, the biblical writer focused on Elisha as the Lord's prophet. Various events of miraculous healing and signs from the Lord are described in 2 Kings 2-4 as being performed by Elisha among the people. It is interesting to note how so many of Elisha's miraculous works closely parallel those of Jesus in the Gospels—healing, raising from the dead, feeding thousands, and so on. Elisha's miracles helped the people understand that he was God's prophet and that God had not abandoned them after He took Elijah away. The Gospels provide us with that same assurance today, as we are reminded of the great lengths God went to in order to demonstrate His love for us and to call us to faith in Him. Even after Jesus ascended to heaven, God sent His Holy Spirit who remains our source of hope and assurance even today.

FRIDAY // 2 KINGS 5; 6:1-23

Second Kings 5 tells the story of Naaman, an Aramean army commander who came to Israel seeking a cure for his skin disease. The Israelite king sent Naaman to Elisha, who in turn sent instructions for Naaman to wash in the Jordan River. Naaman balked at the idea because he, like many of us today, had too much pride to humble himself before this prophet. It took the persuasion of Naaman's servants to convince him to listen to and trust God's prophet and to follow his instructions. Naaman reminds us that we all are in need of God's healing power because of the way sin wreaks havoc in our lives. As Naaman's example shows, God is ready and willing to cleanse and restore us when we humbly approach Him with our need. After Naaman was healed, he tried to give Elisha a gift, but Elisha refused. The prophet's attendant Gehazi privately tried to get something from the commander. Consequently, Gehazi was stricken with a skin disease. The parallel reversal of fortunes that take place in Naaman's and Gehazi's lives remind us that God's power alone transforms us from being selfish and disobedient people to being humble and obedient children of God.

WEEKEND // FINISH UP ANY YOU DIDN'T DO