



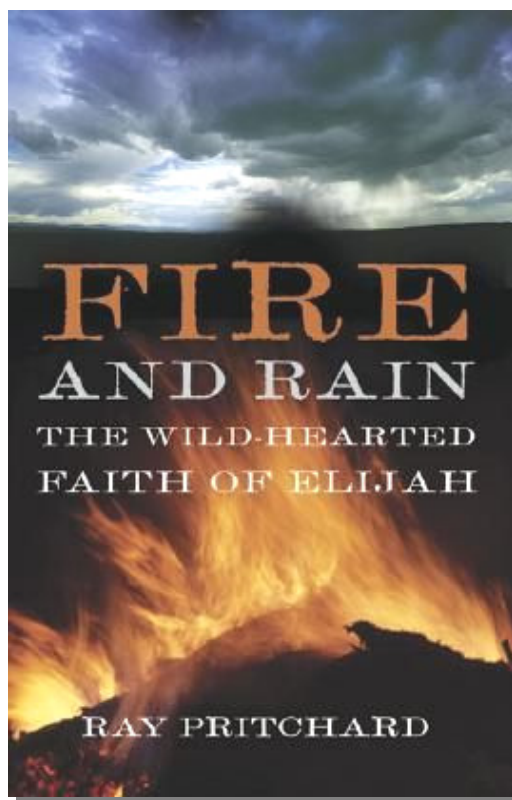
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER



# WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 6, 2010

LESSON #1 FROM THE **MASTERWORK** SERIES STUDY OF:




 Weak Wimp

RISK TAKER



Did you hear about the family from a very remote area of the country that was making their first visit to a big city. They checked in to a grand hotel and stood in amazement at the impressive sight. Leaving the reception desk, they came to the elevator entrance. They'd never seen an elevator before, and just stared at it, unable to figure out what it was for. An old lady hobbled towards the elevator and went inside. The door closed, and about a minute later, the door opened and out came a stunningly good-looking young woman. Dad couldn't stop staring, his mouth open wide in amazement. Without turning his head he patted his son's arm and said, "Go get your mother, son!" Now, that family is what some say is *country come to town!* Others would say that they lived so far out in the country that they had to go *toward town* to hunt.

Before we start, I am led to ask you the question that my wife called and asked me this past Friday as I was finalizing this lesson. She read it as she was working on her Priscilla Shirer Bible study and I've learned that it's not just a coincidence that it's exactly what this new series on Elijah asks. Here's the question, originally posed by Oswald Chambers: *"Have you ever heard the Master say something very difficult to you? If you haven't, I question whether you have ever heard him say anything at all."*

This week we begin an in-depth 8-week Bible study of Elijah—a man, much like the family in my opening story, from a remote, unknown, mountainous and backwoods area known as Tishbeth—or something similar. Our study is from the book by Dr. Ray Pritchard called *Fire and Rain—The Wild-Hearted Faith of Elijah*. And although Elijah was from a place that the sands of time have completely hidden, he came out of this insignificant place—out of nowhere—to make **such** a significant contribution to God's plan for His people that he became one of Israel's most famous heroes. He became a legend because he was a **risk-taker**. And one of the bottom-line questions and challenges running throughout this

series that I want you to think about is: **How much are you willing to risk to become all God wants you to be?** Weak wimp or risk-taker—which are you when it comes to standing up for what God says?

I read something just a few weeks ago that Gallup's annual poll on moral values found that 76-percent of Americans believe moral values in the country are getting worse—up five percent from last year. **Do you agree? Why do you think that is?** Listen to this statement by media mogul and billionaire Ted Turner: *"We're living with outdated rules. The rules we're living under are the Ten Commandments, and I bet nobody here even pays much attention to them because they're too old. When Moses went up on the mountain, there were no nuclear weapons, there was no poverty. Today, the Ten Commandments wouldn't go over. Nobody around likes to be commanded. Commandments are out!"* Obviously the Ten Commandments are not outdated but are still very relevant today. However, Turner was probably right when he says that nobody likes to be commanded. In fact, modern society mocks the truth and exalts the lie. We live in a time when *right* is classified as *wrong* and *wrong* as *right*—that is, what may be wrong for one person is called right for another. I think that's called situational ethics. Turn to **ISAIAH 5:20 (NASB)** and look at what Scripture says: *"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"*

In June 2007, during an interview on CBS, Barack Obama said, *"Whatever we once were, we are **no longer** a Christian nation — at least, not **just**. We are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, and a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers."* Skipping ahead a couple of years to April 2009, listen to what now President Obama stated at a press conference in Turkey about our nation. [PLAY EXCERPT OF OBAMA PRESS CONFERENCE IN TURKEY—1:35]

[HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=QIVD7YT0OWA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIVD7YT0OWA))

Note the progression. In 2007, he said that we are no longer "**just**" a Christian nation. Then, in 2009, as President, he said we "*do not consider ourselves a Christian nation*" **at all**.

As we begin this study of Elijah, I want you to think about you would compare the days of Elijah with our current days. In this study, we're going to see a man who exemplified true heroism and genuine humility even in the relentless pressure of battle. As I think about that, most of us find ourselves asking, "*Where is that kind of man or woman today?*" There are few such men and women, admittedly, and therein lies the disappointment. We're not supposed to just sit back and be quiet, are we? This reminds me of a favorite memory verse from **2 CHRONICLES 7:14 (NIV)**, which most of you know: "*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*"

So, again, I ask and challenge each of you: *How much are you willing to risk to become all God wants you to be?* Let me ask you something that may be difficult for many of you. During this series, would you be willing to pray, "**Lord, do things we're not used to.**" Whew! If so, as Ray Pritchard says, you'd better buckle your seatbelt because God will shake things up. He's not a God of the Status Quo. *First he shakes us up, and then he uses us to shake our world.* That's always been God's method. When God wanted to change the world, he told Noah to do something he had never done before (build an ark) to prepare for something he'd never seen before (rain). When God wanted to bring forth a great nation, he called a successful, middle-aged businessman named Abram and told him to leave Ur of the Chaldees. When God wanted to deliver his people, he found a man slow of speech named Moses and sent him to talk to the Pharaoh. When God needed someone to defeat Goliath, he chose a shepherd boy named David. When Christ wanted some men in his inner circle, he chose fisherman and tax collectors, a loud mouth named Peter and two brothers called the "sons of thunder," and told them to drop everything and

follow him. Talk about doing things you're not used to. I repeat. He's not a God of the Status Quo.

Let's turn to **1 KINGS 16: 29-33 (NASB)** and get the historical background of where Elijah was when he suddenly appeared out of nowhere to confront a powerful man—King Ahab—about his evil and wicked ways: *"<sup>29</sup>Now Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. <sup>30</sup>Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD **more than all who were before him.** <sup>31</sup>It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. <sup>32</sup>So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup>Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him."*

Now, skipping down to **Chapter 17: 1**, we continue reading: *<sup>1</sup>Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."*

Just in case you forgot what you read this week, the background story of the seven kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel unfolds this way: Jeroboam did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Nadab his son did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He was assassinated by Baasha who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He was followed by his son Elah who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He was assassinated by Zimri who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He was assassinated by Omri who did even more evil in the eyes of the Lord. He was succeeded by his son Ahab who was the worst of all the kings of Israel to this point. From Jeroboam to Nadab to Baasha to Elah to Zimri to Omri to Ahab we are **not** going up. The nation is spiraling downward and it seems that just when you think things can't get

any worse, the bottom falls out, and the nation descends even further into idolatry and immorality.

All of a sudden, as we read in **17:1**, this unknown man from a place in Gilead appears and confronts the evil king. Now, when I first read that, I thought, *"WOW, what a special man. Look at all Elijah did and how he ended up."* It would be like me going to Washington D.C. to visit President Obama. How good a chance would I have at getting in to see the President? Ha, I would make it only as far as the front gate. Could you image me telling the security person, I'm Dean Welch of First Baptist Church of Myrtle Beach here with a message from God to the President? There is no way I would get in, because I have no clout in the White House.

So how did Elijah, a small town prophet, get an audience with the king of Israel? He was sent from God. He was called and ordained of God—that's how he made it to the king's presence. When we follow God's will for our life he will do extraordinary things with our life to prove Himself. Despite all Elijah did—all the miracles he performed—I found what James says in **JAMES 5:17 (NIV)** to be very comforting and reassuring to me—and hopefully to you as well. Listen: *"Elijah was a man just like us..."* See, sometimes I think we have a tendency to put Bible characters on a different plane—on a high pedestal to where we can no longer identify with them. And this is tragic because in reality they were frail, imperfect human beings just like we are. They were subject to the same temptations, the same depressions, the same struggles, they had their ups and downs just like you and I, and God still used them.

**How much are you willing to risk to become all God wants you to be?** Billy Graham commented that one of the problems inside the church today is that we laugh at things that used to embarrass us thirty or forty years ago. Or even worse, we don't even laugh anymore. We've become like the proverbial frog in the kettle. We've gotten used to it. As things have declined morally and spiritually in the culture around us, the church has subtly

changed along with the culture. I'm not saying we've changed our convictions, but we are less willing, I think, to go out on a limb for what the Bible really says than we were a generation or two ago. Our writer thinks it's high time we regained some backbone inside the evangelical church.

But, back to our lesson. First Kings 16:29 tells us that Ahab ruled for 22 years and verse 30 says he **"did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him."** And the Bible goes on to say, "not only did he consider it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam (hey their no big deal) but he also married Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, and he began to serve Baal and worship him. And he set up altars for Baal in the temple he built in Samaria for Baal."

Without even knowing what will follow, this passage offers a clue to this woman's significance in the history of Israel, because in the previous chronicles of the history of the northern kingdom we are **never** told the names of the wives of the kings. Now, suddenly, we are not only told the name of the next king, Ahab, but are also given the name of the woman he married—Jezebel. Why?

Jezebel was an evil murderess and Ahab was a weak, wicked wimp. Though Ahab was King it was she who controlled the throne, she was the one who welded the power. Jezebel was a jealous worshipper of Baal and she was determined to have the worship of her god declared as the official religion of Israel. She was the one who then initiated Baal worship. Baal was the god of fertility, the god of rain and the god of crops. Baal worship included human sacrifice and was usually accompanied by drunken orgies and all kinds of sexual perversion. This is what made it so popular to the people and so detestable to God.

The time was perfect for God's prophet. Oswald Sanders says that *"Elijah appeared at zero hour in Israel's history."* Nobody could have handled a couple like Ahab and Jezebel better than Elijah, The rugged, gaunt prophet from Tishbeth became God's

instrument of confrontation. F. B. Meyer calls Jezebel the *Lady Macbeth* of the Old Testament. She bore all the markings of demon possession, and according to the record of her deeds, she was, in fact, Satan's woman of the hour.

Now, let's look again at **1 KINGS 17:1 (NASB)**: *Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."* No holds barred—Elijah just barrels right into the middle of this era of gross evil and wickedness without questioning God at all. Remember my earlier question from Beverly? It goes well right here, doesn't it: *"Have you ever heard the Master say something very difficult to you? If you haven't, I question whether you have ever heard him say anything at all."*

I still think about how I would respond if God convicted you or me to go see the President of the United States with a similar message. Would we be willing to stand alone in the **gap** and say what God's Word says? There are certainly men and women throughout time who were willing to stand alone against the strongest forces of their day and, without reluctance or embarrassment, proclaim the name of the LORD. Remember the brave students at Columbine High in Colorado a few years ago? Also, remember what God led his great prophet to write about this in **EZEKIEL 22:30 (NASB)**? *"I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one."*

The question continues today. As Dr. Charles Swindoll writes in his book on Elijah: *Our LORD is still searching for people who will make a difference. Christians dare not be mediocre. We dare not dissolve into the background or blend into the neutral scenery of this world... Elijah's life teaches us what the LORD requires.*

As we wrap up this introduction, I want us to think about three lasting lessons learned from this gap-standing prophet, Elijah. But

first, turn to **1 CORINTHIANS 15:58 (NIV)** and follow along: *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.* Now, turn over one chapter to **1 CORINTHIANS 16:13 (NLT)** and listen, *Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.*

Lesson #1: **God looks for special people at difficult times.** God needed a special man to shine the light in the blackness of those dark days and notice that He didn't find him in the palace or the court. He didn't find him walking around with his head down in the school of the prophets. He didn't even find him in the homes of ordinary people. God found him in Tishbeth, of all places. A man who would stand in the gap couldn't be suave or slick—he had to be tough! God look for somebody who had the backbone to stand alone. Someone who had the courage to say, *"That's wrong!"* Someone who could stand toe to tow with an idolater and proclaim, *"God is God!"* That's exactly what we need today—respected professionals, athletes, housewives, teachers, public figures and private citizens who will promote the things of God, who will stand alone—stand tall, stand firm, stand strong!

How's your stature and integrity? Have you corrupted your principles to stay in business? To be with the *in* crowd? To earn the next promotion? Have you winked at language or behavior that a few years ago would have horrified you? Are you compromising morally because you don't want to be considered a prude?

Lesson #2: **God's methods are often surprising.** God did not raise up an army to destroy Ahab and Jezebel. Neither did he send some clever and creative prince to argue His case or try to impress their royal majesties. Instead, God did the unimaginable—He chose somebody like ... well, Elijah. Are you thinking right now that maybe somebody else is better qualified for that short-term mission project? For that leadership position? For that community service? Do you see other people as *special* or *called* or *talented*? Don't discount that God's methods are often surprising, IN fact, at

times, I've found them illogical. They don't really make good sense to our finite minds. David's brothers laughed at the thought of his standing against Goliath. And what about Joshua walking around the walls of Jericho and blowing those trumpets?

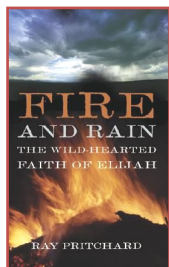
**Lesson #3: *We stand before God.*** When we're standing alone in the gap, ultimately, we're standing before God. When the call comes, will God find us ready and willing to stand for Him? Will He find in us hearts that are completely His? God is looking for men and women whose hearts are completely His—men and women who won't blend into the scenery.

Remember that everyone wants progress—nobody wants change! Change is scary, upsets the routine. Causes us to think about things in a different way. Pulls us out of our comfort zone. But, as God reminds us in the last phrase of **HEBREWS 13: 5 (NASB)**, *"...I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"* What spot has God given you? Whatever it is, God says, *"You're standing before ME and I want to use YOU as My unique spokesperson in your day and age, at this moment and time."*

Elijah, this gaunt, rugged figure striding out of nowhere, suddenly stepping into the pages of history, is a clear witness of the value of one life completely committed to God. An unknown man from a backwoods place, he was called to stand against evil in the most turbulent and violent and decadent of times. Look around. The need is still great, and God is still searching.

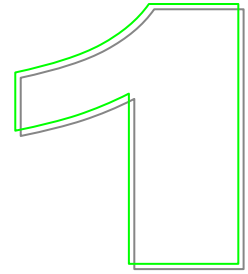
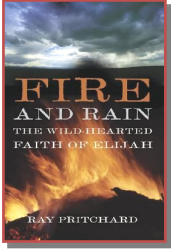
*How much are you willing to risk to become all God wants you to be. Are you willing to pray, "Lord, do things we're not used to."*

**Let's Pray.**



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1. One of the bottom-line questions and challenges running throughout this series is: How much are you willing to \_\_\_\_\_ to become all God wants \_\_\_\_\_ to be?
2. We live in a time when \_\_\_\_\_ is classified as *wrong* and \_\_\_\_\_ as *right*... That's what's called *situational ethics*.  
  
\* **ISAIAH 5:20** says, "Woe to those who call \_\_\_\_\_ good, and \_\_\_\_\_ evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"
3. Our God is not a God of the \_\_\_\_\_. First he shakes us up, and then he uses us to shake our \_\_\_\_\_.
4. **JAMES 5:17** says, "Elijah was a man \_\_\_\_\_ like \_\_\_\_\_..."
5. Remember what God led his great prophet to write about this in **EZEKIEL 22: 30**: "I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found \_\_\_\_\_."
6. **1 CORINTHIANS 16:13**: Be on guard. \_\_\_\_\_ in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.
7. Three Lessons learned from Elijah, the gap-standing prophet:
  - (1) God looks for special people at \_\_\_\_\_ times.
  - (2) God's \_\_\_\_\_ are often surprising.
  - (3) We \_\_\_\_\_ before God.

*"Have you ever heard the Master say something very difficult to you? If you haven't, I question whether you have ever heard him say anything at all." – Oswald Chambers*