

Introduction: As a people *devoted to the one true God*, the enmity of the world is frequently directed towards the church in both the Old and New Testaments. The experience of slavery in Egypt comes to be known *throughout the rest of Scripture* as the model of what God's people in each age will face from a benighted and hostile world. Only God's care enables the church and individual believers to live fruitfully and purposefully in this world; only His eye upon them ensures their continued perseverance in hope; only His resurrection power guarantees that their work, in the end, will not be in vain; only His provisions, like manna from Heaven, give them their daily bread in a world that is a wilderness for them. Let us see how such daily care surrounded God's people even in the dark days of Elijah, as we continue our study of his ministry in this week's Bible notes.

Monday: read 1 Kings 18:36-40. The sinful and cruel idolatry of the prophets of Baal and Asherah, who "ate at Jezebel's table" (1 Kings 18:19) and (we may infer) were her murderous tools in the slaughter of so many prophets of the LORD (1 Kings 18:4,13), is paid back in their laps as the fire of the LORD consumes *not only* Elijah's offerings (1 Kings 18:34) but also their lives – as zeal for the name of the LORD of hosts propels Israel to rid these false prophets from their midst. This is what the command of the Law through Moses required, and this is how Israel obeyed Elijah - as per Deuteronomy 13:6-11.

But the most awesome irony of the LORD's accurate judgments against such idolatry is that the blood of the prophets of Baal flowed (1 Kings 18:40) in the dry river beds of the Kishon valley – which John MacArthur points out were some of the very dry places on which their idolatry brought drought for the past three years (1 Kings 17:1 & 1 Kings 18:2,18).

Meditate & Pray: Oh, how accurate our God's ways! If He judges His enemies with such careful precision, making their punishment fit the crime – then we may be sure that His chastening hand in our lives is for our good.

Tues/Weds/Thurs: read 1 Kings 18:40; Psalm 11:1-7 & Hebrews 12:4-7. The following verses and hymns reflect further on God's precise, holy and just knowledge of all men and all their sin – even the wickedest Ahab or prophet of Baal (1 Kings 18:40), while also reminding us of His precise care for our lives.

Psalm 11:4-5 describes God's concentrated evaluation of the lives of all mankind:

*The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD's throne is in heaven;
his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.*

⁵ *The LORD tests the righteous,
but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.*

The picture from Psalm 11:4 is of our God, who cares enough about His creation to scrunch his eyes as He views the lives of all – even the wicked. His judgments are laser-focused on the sins of men. How much more are His eyes concentrated upon His children. Every blow of His fatherly rod is precisely thought-out and exactly what we need, as Hebrews 12:4-7 affirms too:

⁴ *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?*

*"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.*

⁶ *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”*

⁷ *It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

Meditate and Pray: Ask the LORD to enable you to appreciate His disciplining hand upon your life. Ask Him to enable you to submit to God’s chastening. Ask Him especially to save you from the bowed neck and unbowed heart of those who rebel against God’s rod – a warning taken from the following 1599 comments of the Geneva Bible:

Hebrews 12:4 – “The writer of Hebrews takes an argument for the profit which comes to us by God’s chastisements ..., First of all because sin, or that rebellious wickedness of our flesh, is by this means turned.”

Hebrews 12:5 – “Secondly, because God’s chastisements are testimony of His fatherly good will toward us”, (beware of those who) “...show themselves to be bastards, because they cannot abide to be chastened by God.”

I close with two quotes from Puritans. First, on Psalm 11:4: ***His eyelids test the children of man.***

Consider that God not only sees into all you do, but he sees it to that very end that he may examine and search into it. He doth not behold you with a common and indifferent look, but with a searching, watchful, and inquisitive eye: he pries into the reasons, the motives, the ends of all your actions ... See Revelation 1:14, where Christ is described: “His eyes are as a flame of fire.”

You know the property of fire is to search and make trial of those things which are exposed unto it, and to separate the dross from the pure metal: so, God's eye is like fire, to try and examine the actions of men: he knows and discerns how much your very purest duties have in them of mixture, and base ends of formality, hypocrisy, distractedness, and deadness: he sees through all your specious pretenses, that which you cast as a mist before the eyes of men when yet thou art but a juggler in religion: all your tricks and sleights of outward profession, all those things that you use to cozen and delude men withal, cannot possibly impose upon him: he is a God that can look through all those fig-leaves of outward profession, and discern the nakedness of your duties through them. Ezekiel Hopkins, D.D.

Psalm 11:5: ***The Lord tries the righteous.***

Times of affliction and persecution will distinguish the precious from the vile, it will show the difference between the counterfeit from the true. Persecution is a Christian's touchstone, that will try what metal men are made of, whether they be silver or tin, gold or dross, wheat or chaff, shadow or substance, carnal or spiritual, sincere or hypocritical. Nothing speaks out more soundness and uprightness than a pursuing after holiness, even then when holiness is most afflicted, pursued, and persecuted in the world: to stand fast in fiery trials argues much integrity within. Thomas Brooks.

Friday: read 1 Kings 18:40 & Psalm 9:15-10:15. As we reflect soberly on the judgment that falls on the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:40, how timely David’s prayer in Psalm 9:19-20 sounds in such days of judgment! “Arise, O Lord, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, O LORD; let the nations know they are but men.”

Meditate and Pray: Lord, thank you for the mighty prayers of these Psalms of judgment, as their author wages a war of imprecation against the wicked. Though many of these “war-prayers” cannot find proper expression on

our sin-compromised lips, we thank you that the Psalms are the songs of our warrior King Jesus – and He with absolute integrity and measured, holy retribution can utter the prayer: “Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out.” Amen to these words in the mouth of our Savior from Psalm 10:15!

Sat/Sun: read 1 Kings 18:41-19:3; Psalm 10:1-2 & 13 & Psalm 22:1. There are certain key questions which those lamenting wickedness characteristically ask. We take the first question for today: “Why O LORD? Why does the wicked man revile God?” (Psalm 10:13); “Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1) Elijah surely must have uttered such perplexed questions of grief as he ran for his life from the threats of Queen Jezebel in 1 Kings 19:3. Aroused by Ahab’s report about Elijah and the slaughter of Baal’s prophets, she made a vow to wreak her vengeance on Elijah’s head. “Where are you, LORD?” must have been one of the panicked questions on Elijah’s lips as he ran.

Such questions are throughout the Psalms and express the profound darkness into which the tested and afflicted believer may fall. It is a most difficult place to be, to have every fiber of your being cry out: “Why?” Even Jesus knew the depth of perplexity behind this question, as He cried out in real God-forsakenness on the Cross: “Why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1) But, of course, don’t forget this: Our Savior’s “Why?” was much deeper in its suffering and inexplicability than our questions ever will be!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God for what Pastor Tim Keller calls “the relative nature of our perplexity and darkness.” We may for a long time ask “Why?” and not receive an answer from the LORD. It is hard to live in a world given over to idolatry. We may have to wait until Heaven before all our questions will be answered. But, when that time comes, our hearts will break forth in adoration and praise – because every answer to our “Why’s?” will be a light-filled answer!

But oh, how different for Jesus when He cried out “Why... Why have you, my God, forsaken me?” Can we ever really understand how it could be that, *at the very time when Christ’s obedience was at its height, as He willingly went to the Cross to honor His Father*, then it was that He was God-forsaken? There was no answer to Christ’s “Why?” except the mystery of Christ’s taking our sins to the depths of the God-forsakenness of Hell!