

THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

**A Study of Israel's God During The
Days Of Elijah And Elisha**

by Joshua Creel



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CONTENTS



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INTRODUCTION

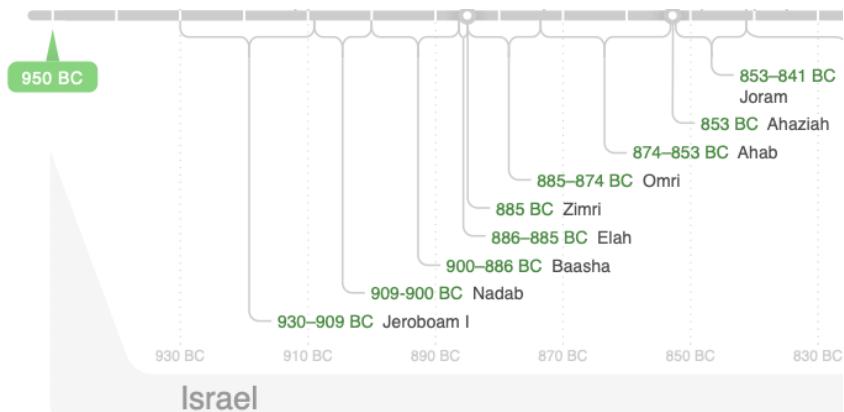
ISRAEL LEADING UP TO OMRI

If we were to look at some children's material for the period of the Divided Kingdom, we would likely find 2 lists of kings: one for the kings of Judah, another for the kings of Israel. Each king would be represented by either a smiling face for a king that followed God or a frowning face for a king that disobeyed God. Judah's list would have a few smiling faces found among the frowns; no smiling faces would be found among Israel's kings. It did not have to be that way.

Many will remember God's displeasure with Solomon because "his heart was turned away from the Lord" (1Kings 11.9). As a result, God declared that He was ripping part of the kingdom from Solomon. The Lord's choice to lead the northern tribes of Israel was Jeroboam and God promised that if Jeroboam would follow His commands, He would establish his kingdom (1Kings 11.37-38). As we know, Jeroboam did not follow the commands of Jehovah.

As a result of Jeroboam rejecting the ways of God, his house would not endure (1Kings 14.7-10). In fact, Israel was doomed to political instability especially during the early part of her history.¹

1. Dynasty of Jeroboam
 - Jeroboam (930-909 BC)
 - Nadab (909-908 BC)
2. Dynasty of Baasha
 - Baasha (908-885 BC)
 - Elah (885-884 BC)
3. Zimri (884 BC, ruled for only 7 days after assassinating Elah)
4. Tibni (884-881 BC, half of the people followed Tibni during a 4 year civil war following the death of Zimri)
5. Dynasty of Omri
 - Omri (881-873 BC)
 - Ahab (873-852 BC)
 - Ahaziah (852 - 851 BC)
 - Joram (851-841 BC)



THE HOUSE OF OMRI

Several chapters are devoted to the reign of Ahab while a mere 10 verses are devoted to Omri, the founder of the dynasty (1Kings 16.16-17, 21-28). Yet, we must not underestimate his

¹ dates taken from FF Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*

importance. There is some debate as to whether Omri was an Israelite given that his father is not named, nor is there any family or tribal association given (contrast with Tibni in 1Kings 16:21). Omri had served as the commander of Elah's army (vs. 16) and it was not unheard of for foreigners to rise to prominence in the army. Consider that David enlisted Ahimelech the Hittite (1 Sam 26:6), Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 23:39), Zelek the Ammonite (2 Sam 23:37) and Ittai the Gittite (2 Sam 18:2). However, this line of reasoning is not conclusive. What we can know for sure is that Omri did much to strengthen the kingdom of Israel.

- The choice of Samaria as capital (vs. 24) would prove to be an enduring one as it would remain Israel's capital until the destruction of the kingdom in 720 BC. It was strategically located from both military and commercial standpoints.
- Omri expanded Israel's borders via conquest, in particular by suppressing Moab (see 2Kings 3:4). Note this inscription from the Mesha Stela: "Omri was the king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land.
- He allied Israel with Phoenicia by choosing Jezebel, daughter of the Phoenician king Ethbaal, to be the wife of his son Ahab (vs. 31). "This reestablishment of Phoenician-Israelite ties secured inland markets for the Phoenicians and Mediterranean trade for Israel. It effectively cut Aram-Damascus out of the trade routes passing from Arabia and the Red Sea up the King's Highway of Transjordan and on to the Mediterranean Sea. This alliance is one of the major causes for the century of warfare between Aram-Damascus and Israel in the ninth and eighth centuries b.c."²
- Assyrian records would refer to Israel as "the house of Omri" until Israel's destruction in 720. Even the Biblical writers would sometimes refer to a member of Ahab's family by their relation to Omri (see 2Kings 8:26; 2Chronicles 22:2).

THE REIGN OF AHAB

We will look at Ahab's reign in some detail in this study, but there are a few things to note as we get started. First, Israel remained a military power during his reign. This is best seen in the Kurkh Monolith inscription of Shalmaneser III, describing the Battle of Qarqar in 853 BC. Ahab is said to have brought 2000 chariots and 10,000 infantry to the battle, second only to the Syrian force. Yet, the Biblical writers portray Ahab as personally weak. We will note this aspect of Ahab's character in such accounts as the Mt. Carmel showdown (1Kings 18) and Naboth's Vineyard (1Kings 21).

Of great significance is what the text says regarding Ahab leading Israel further into apostasy: "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. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. 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." (1 Kings 16:31–33, NASB95)

It should be noted that Ahab was not looking to replace worship of Jehovah with worship of Baal, rather he was instituting a syncretic system of worship where both were worshiped. Note that Ahab references Jehovah in the naming of his children:

- Jehoram: Yahweh is high
- Ahaziah: Yahweh has taken hold
- Athaliah: Yahweh is exalted

While the worship of Baal had already been a problem in Israel's history, what Ahab

and Jezebel did was to make idolatry a part of Israel's national identity. "In accepting Baal, Ahab was simply bringing his kingdom closer to the mainstream of ancient Near Eastern thought and practice. In fact, most cities and kingdoms in the region had their local versions of Baal... Under Ahab Israel became yet another Baal-worshiping nation state."³

Finally, let's take a quick look at the conclusion of 1Kings 16: "In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundations with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun." (1 Kings 16:34, NASB95) On the surface, this passage demonstrates the ambition of Ahab, as would numerous other building projects. However, we also know that this was done with blatant disregard for the Lord's command (see Joshua 6:26). Could the passage also demonstrate a deeper issue? Why would God command that Jericho not be rebuilt? For centuries the city had stood watch over the pass into the interior of Canaan. Could it be that the Lord was saying Israel should put its trust in Him, not in fortifications? Thus, Ahab put his trust in fortifications, not the Lord.

RISE OF THE PROPHETS

While the popular conception of prophecy is that of relating information concerning future events, that was not the only function or even the main function of Biblical prophets. A prophet was a spokesman for God, delivering any message God chose to give, whether relating to events in the distant future, to the current status of God's people or even the reminder of God's gracious acts in the past.

Israel had prophets scattered throughout her history going all the way back to Moses (see Deuteronomy 18:15-18). However, once the kingdom divided following Solomon's death, prophets come to the forefront of God's dealing with His people and with their kings. Note how the prophets began appearing even before Elijah is introduced:

- A prophet, a "man of God", rebuked Jeroboam after he erected the golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1Kings 13)
- Ahijah the prophet foretold the ending of Jeroboam's dynasty (1Kings 14)
- Jehu prophesied how Baasha's dynasty would end (1Kings 16)

So, it is significant that right after we are introduced to Ahab and Jezebel who "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him" (1Kings 16:33), we are introduced to Elijah (1Kings 17:1).

This man of God, who would risk his life by confronting kings, is given little introduction other than stating that he was from Tishbe in Gilead (on the eastern side of the Jordan River) and that his family still worshipped Jehovah (his name means, "My God is Yahweh"). His background and history are secondary to the fact that he was a faithful spokesman for the Lord.



The work of Elijah and Elisha would continue throughout the reigns of Ahab and his two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram. Israel's rulers and her people may have forgotten God, but He had not forgotten them! "Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets.'" (2 Kings 17:13)

WHERE WE'RE GOING

On the surface, this class is an examination of Israel during the days of Elijah and then Elisha. But while men and women such as Elijah, Ahab, Naaman, Jezebel and the widow of Zarephath play roles in the narrative, the key figure is Israel's God, Jehovah. So, we are not going to be looking at the text chapter by chapter, rather we are going to look at what this time in Israel's history says about God in relation to idols, what it says about God and His people, and what the text reveals about God and the nations.



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 2: JEHOVAH VS. BAAL (1 KINGS 17-18)

Elijah's "showdown" with the prophets of Baal and Asherah is perhaps the story of the prophet we know best. If we were to travel to Israel and scale Mount Carmel we would even find a statue commemorating the event. And while Elijah's faithfulness to Jehovah remains an example for us to follow, this account is about the triumph of Jehovah over all other gods, in this case over Baal. Recall from the introduction that Ahab was not necessarily trying to replace the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal, rather he was bringing Israel more into the mainstream of religious practices of the day. Ahab was instituting a syncretic system where both Jehovah and Baal would be worshiped. But Jehovah will tolerate no rivals, so the people were instructed to chose where their loyalty would reside: "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." (1 Kings 18:21, NASB95)

BAAL

The term "baal" has the meaning of "lord" or "master". Thus, the word is translated as "owner" (Exodus 21:8), "lord" (Isaiah 16:8) and even "husband" (Proverbs 12:4) in the Scriptures. As a generic term it could refer to any god, including Jehovah. But of course, it is best known to us as the name of a Canaanite deity. This deity appears under many names in the Scriptures, sometimes affiliated with a particular location (Baal-Peor in Numbers 25:1-9), sometimes representing a different culture (Chemosh of the Moabites, Numbers 21:29), and sometimes referencing a specific attribute (Baal-Berith in Judges 8:33 meaning "Baal of the covenant").

Israel had given its allegiance to Baal numerous times in her history. While traveling toward the Promised Land, they had been seduced by Moabite women to worship their idol (Numbers 25:1-9). Throughout the period of the Judges, Israel would turn away from Jehovah to worship the Baals (Judges 2:11-13; 3:7; 6:25-32; 8:33; 10:6). While the people put their Baals away during the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:2-6), the temptation to serve Baal would remain.

Much of our information regarding Baal comes from excavations at the ancient city of Ugarit. It's important to note that Ugarit was a city in Syria, so their beliefs regarding Baal may have some differences from Canaanite beliefs, but it would seem they were mostly in line with each other. They worshiped a pantheon of gods including:

- El, the head of the pantheon.
- Dagon, father of Baal and best known to us as principle deity of the Philistines (Judges 16; 1 Samuel 5).



- Asherah, fertility goddess and consort of El.
- Baal. "As the storm god and bringer of rain, Baal was recognized as sustaining the fertility of crops, animals, and people. His followers often believed that sexual acts performed in his temple would boost Baal's sexual prowess, and thus contribute to his work in increasing fertility." (Lexham Bible Dictionary)

That Baal and Asherah would be the principle gods worshiped by the Canaanites is due to their association with agriculture and fertility. In a society dependent on rainfall and the fertility of both the ground and livestock, these "gods" would have constantly vied for the affection of any people, including Jehovah's people.

At Ugarit, a series of myths regarding Baal were found. Of particular interest for our study of 1Kings 17-18 is the myth of Baal and Mot. "Although Baal could withstand virtually anyone, he could not resist Mot, the god of death. Baal recognized that fact and once in Mot's grip, he died. The other gods were grief-stricken and dismayed. Since Baal was a storm god, there was no more rain, and the longer he remained dead, the longer the drought. Mot did not listen to anyone's pleading except to make impossible demands. The minor god Athtar receives the chance to replace Baal as king of the gods, but refuses the position after he discovers that the throne is too tall for his feet to touch the ground. Anath then visits Mot, hacks him into tiny pieces, and sows them all over the countryside. As new life emerges, Baal is revived." (Lexham Bible Dictionary) Some believe this myth reflected the alternation of seasons on an annual basis, but it may be that the story was meant to explain longer periods of drought. "from time to time the rains may not have come, and periods of drought would disrupt the regular pattern of the seasons. Perhaps the story of Baal and Mot was intended to reassure the worshiper that if occasionally Mot appeared to have the upper hand over Baal, nevertheless Baal would indeed return, and Mot would not prevail forever." (Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books)

THE LORD, NOT BAAL, IS GOD!

Everything in 1Kings 17-18 is meant to impress upon the reader that Jehovah, not Baal, is the real god. We naturally dwell more on the sensational showdown on Mount Carmel, but God's power and Baal's impotence are seen in the opening verse: "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."'" (1 Kings 17:1, NASB95)

1. The rains and dew were part of a consistent cycle in Canaan. The "former rains" would fall between late October and early January, while the "latter rains" would fall between April and early May. Furthermore, the annual rains were part of Jehovah's blessing to His people (see Deuteronomy 33.28), but would be withheld when Israel broke her covenant (Deuteronomy 11.16-17; 28.23-24).
2. Ahab and Jezebel had led Israel further into apostasy, forsaking sole allegiance to Jehovah in order to accommodate worship of the storm god Baal. Jehovah responded not only by punishing the disobedience of His people, but by proving Baal to be powerless! "By withholding rain, Yahweh is demonstrating the power of his kingship in the very area of nature over which Baal is thought to have jurisdiction. Announcing this beforehand to Ahab is the means by which Yahweh's kingship and power are being portrayed. If Baal is the provider of rain and Yahweh announces that he will withhold it, the contest is on." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
3. We will cover 1Kings 17.2-24 in a future lesson, but these verses demonstrate Jehovah's ability to provide for His people (Elijah) and for the nations (significantly, Zarephath was

in Phoenicia the homeland of Jezebel). Jehovah could do what Baal could not!

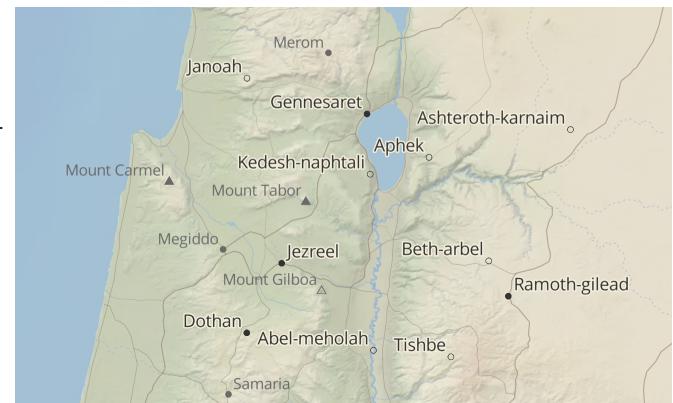
As you read 1Kings 18, these notes may help illuminate the text and emphasize the magnitude of Jehovah's victory over Baal.

- Vs. 3, Obadiah's name means "servant of Yahweh"
- Vs. 4, Jezebel's slaying of Jehovah's prophets does not necessarily mean that she and Ahab were trying to eradicate the worship of Jehovah. Rather, as these prophets would have resisted the cult of Baal, their death was necessary to institute the new system of syncretic worship.
- Vs. 5, contrast Ahab's actions with those of David when Israel faced famine (see 2Samuel 21.1). "His priority need was fodder for his military forces, including the horses to draw the two thousand chariots he was to contribute to the allies fighting Assyria." (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)
- Vs. 17, Ahab may have viewed Elijah as having incurred the wrath of Baal, thus resulting in the drought.
- Vs. 19, Mount Carmel may have been chosen for a few reasons. It rose 1600 feet above the sea, thus providing a broad view of the Jezreel Valley. It was a lush region, but it would have also experienced some affects of the 3 year drought. Finally, it formed part of the boarder between Israel and Phoenicia, making it the perfect location for this contest between gods.
- Vs. 23, note how Elijah allows the Baal prophets the choice of ox. Every action is taken to avoid the risk of fraud.
- Vs. 24, "The people believed Baal to represent the sun-god also and in their epics thought he rode the thunderclouds and sent lightning (as did the Hebrews the Lord, Pss 18:14; 104:3–4)." (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)
- Vs. 27, perhaps Elijah's taunts relate to the myth of Baal and Mot. Had Baal left his house for the underworld? Was he possibly dead?
- Vs. 28, "The practice of self-inflicted wounds to arouse a deity's pity or response is attested in Ugarit when men 'bathed in their own blood like an ecstatic prophet'. In mourning this was forbidden to the Hebrews (Lev. 19:28; Deut. 14:1)." (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)
- Vs. 29, Baal is completely impotent. Note Jeremiah 10.5.
- Vs. 30, we don't know why there was an alter of Jehovah on Carmel. Perhaps it had become a place of worship once the kingdom divided.
- Vs. 31, the 12 stones would represent the 12 tribes united in worship (see Joshua 4.2-5)
- Vs. 32, each "measure" would have been the equivalent of 11 quarts.
- Vss. 36-37, contrast Elijah's simple prayer with the ravings of the Baal priests (vss. 26-29). Also note that not only does Elijah pray that Jehovah would respond, but that the people may turn back to Him.
- Vs. 38, "In one passage from Ugarit, Baal states, "I understand lightning, which not even the heavens know." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) Baal



could not respond with fire from heaven, Jehovah could!

- Vs. 40, "As a result of this contest, the petition of Elijah is heard (the sacrifice is consumed), Yahweh sends rain (the drought ends), and the warfare with Baal is concluded (prophets are slain), with Yahweh having demonstrated himself superior to Baal in Baal's own terms." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) Note that death was the punishment for false prophets (Deuteronomy 13.5,13-18; 17.2-5).
- Vs. 41, the Kishon would swell and flood during periods of heavy rain. Thus, Elijah instructed Ahab to leave. Also, the instruction to "eat and drink", i.e. feast, would be significant in that the drought was coming to an end.
- Vs. 45, "Rainfall in the Holy Land typically occurs only when storms push their way across the Mediterranean Sea, usually accompanied by strong winds and dramatic clouds. There is no better location at which to experience these storms than the summit of Mount Carmel. The Canaanites attributed the power of such storms to Baal, as in this passage from the Baal Cycle at Ugarit: 'Baal (can) send his rain in due season ... shout aloud in the clouds ... shoot (his) lightning-bolts to the earth.'" (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary)
- Vs. 46, Jezreel was 27 kilometers from Mount Carmel.



TAKEAWAYS

The first of the ten commandments was, "you shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20.3). This wasn't an invitation to worship other gods so long as Israel placed Jehovah first. No, Israel's God would tolerate no rivals; their allegiance must be to Him and Him alone. And God has not changed! "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Matthew 6:24, NASB95) Many today pledge allegiance to the Lord, but their days are filled serving their own lusts and bowing down to the gods of our time (power, money, relevancy, etc.). Jehovah tolerates no rivals, we are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22.37).

Elijah and Obadiah were part of the few who remained absolutely loyal to Jehovah during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. But the episode on Mount Carmel showed that even though God's people may be in the minority, those who remain faithful will stand vindicated. "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed." (2 Thessalonians 1:6–10, NASB95)



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 3: JEHOVAH VS. BAAL (2 KINGS 1)

You may be surprised to find that we have skipped ahead in our study. That's because we are following a thematic outline rather than chronological. As we've stated from the outset, our aim in studying the period of time where Elijah (and Elisha) prophesied is to learn what we can about Jehovah. Our first lesson from 1Kings 17-18 focused on the contest between Jehovah and Baal. 2Kings 1 also focuses on that contest, this time looking at an episode during the reign of Ahab's son, Ahaziah.

THE REIGN OF AHAZIAH

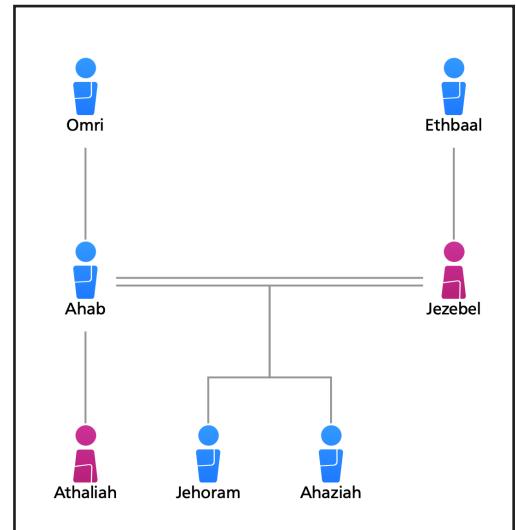
Ahaziah's brief reign is summarized in 1Kings 22.51-53, "Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel. He did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. So he served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger, according to all that his father had done." (1 Kings 22:51–53, NASB95) In other words, Ahaziah did nothing to improve Israel's relationship with Jehovah.

2Kings 1.1-2 may demonstrate how the Lord's anger (1Kings 22.53) was experienced by Ahaziah as he faced rebellion and personal tragedy. The rebellion of Moab is dealt with further in chapter 3 and is commemorated in the Mesha Inscription: "I am Mesha, son of Kemosh[yatti], the king of Moab, the Daybonite. My father ruled over Moab 30 years, and I ruled after my father. And I made this high place for Kemosh in Qarho, a high place of salvation,

because he has saved me from all the kings and because he caused me to prevail over all my enemies. Now Omri, king of Israel oppressed Moab many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him, and he also said, "I will oppress Moab." In my days he spoke this, but I prevailed over him and over his house. Now Israel utterly perished forever. Now Omri had taken possession of the land of Madaba. And he dwelt in it his days and half the days of his son, 40 years, but Kemosh restored it in my days." The rebellions of Moab, then Edom (2Kings 8.20) and Libnah (2Kings 8.22), demonstrated the weakening of Israel and Judah as they departed from the Lord. However, it's the personal tragedy of Ahaziah that drives the narrative in 2Kings 1 and allows us to not only see Jehovah's triumph over Baal (again), but also the importance of Jehovah's spokesman Elijah.



MESHA INSCRIPTION



NOTES FROM THE TEXT

As you read 2Kings 1, these notes may help illuminate the text and emphasize the magnitude of Jehovah's victory over Baal.

- Vs. 2
 - » Ahaziah's command to "go, inquire..." refers to seeking the divine will of Baal by means of an oracle, a practice forbidden by God (see Leviticus 19.31).
 - » Baal-zebub means "lord of the flies" but it may very well have been a corruption of Baal-zebul, "Baal the prince". It is quite possible that the Biblical writer chose to reference this false god with a more derogatory title.
 - » Ekron was one of the 5 most important Philistine cities, first referenced in Joshua 13.2-3.
- Vs. 3, Elijah raises the central question: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?" We would hope that God's victory on Mt. Carmel (1Kings 18) would have cemented His place as Lord of Israel. Sadly, the people remained obstinate.
- Vs. 4, Elijah's "thus says the Lord" is not by accident. Ahaziah meant to consult an oracle of Baal. Well, here was the message of the one, true God!
- Vs. 9
 - » While we cannot be certain, the hill referenced in this verse could have been Mount Carmel. It would be a dwelling place of Elisha (2Kings 2.25; 4.25)
 - » "man of God" was a term used for a prophet (1Samuel 2.27; 9.6,10; 1Kings 13.14-18). Its use by Ahaziah's messengers does not reflect any belief they may have had in Jehovah.
- Vs. 10
 - » The use of fire is significant for two reasons. First, Baal was identified with fire and lightening, but it was Jehovah who could punish with fire from heaven (see also Genesis 19.24; Exodus 9.23-24; Numbers 11.1-3; 1Kings 18.38). Second, this links Elijah to Moses who had also "summoned" fire from the Lord (Exodus 9.23-24). Elijah and Moses before him were spokesmen of God; they could do what no oracle of Baal could!
 - » This passage also serves as the probable background of Luke 9.54. The commander and his 50 men represented Ahaziah who had rejected the Lord and His prophet. They were punished with fire. James and John thought the village of Samaria deserved the same for rejecting Jesus.
- Vs. 15, note that Ahaziah had twice commanded for Elijah to come down (vss. 9,11), but Elijah went only after the angel of the Lord told him to do so.



TAKEAWAYS

The key takeaway from this chapter is Jehovah's superiority over Baal. Ahaziah had sent his messengers to consult an oracle of Baal. He desired a divine answer as to whether

he would recover from his injuries or not. But it was Jehovah who provided the divine answer: Ahaziah would not recover (vss. 16-17). If Ahaziah had acknowledged Jehovah as “God in Israel”, perhaps he would have received a more favorable response!

The role of God’s prophet is also significant in this chapter. By sending to a foreign oracle, Ahaziah had rejected the Lord AND His prophet. Tragically, the Lord’s spokesmen were frequently rejected:

- Moses was rejected by Israel several times, as when Korah rebelled (Numbers 16). Significantly, Moses foretold that the Lord would raise up another Prophet that the people must listen to (Deuteronomy 18.15-18).
- That prophet was Jesus (see Acts 3.22). Yet, the people also rejected His words, thus rejecting God (John 12.48). Significantly, the leaders of the people accused Jesus of working by the power of Beelzebul (Mark 3.22), likely referencing the very power that Ahaziah wished to consult.

The lesson for us is clear: listen to those clearly marked as spokesmen of God (1John 4.6). To reject them, is to reject Him!



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 4: JEHOVAH PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE (1KINGS 19)

So far our studies have focused on Jehovah's triumph over Baal. The episodes in 1Kings 18 and 2Kings 1 should have convinced Israel's kings and her people to place their trust in the Lord. And if they had, they would have experienced the Lord's care and provision (Deuteronomy 28.1-14). But even though Israel as a nation had turned away from the Lord, Jehovah was still providing for His people.

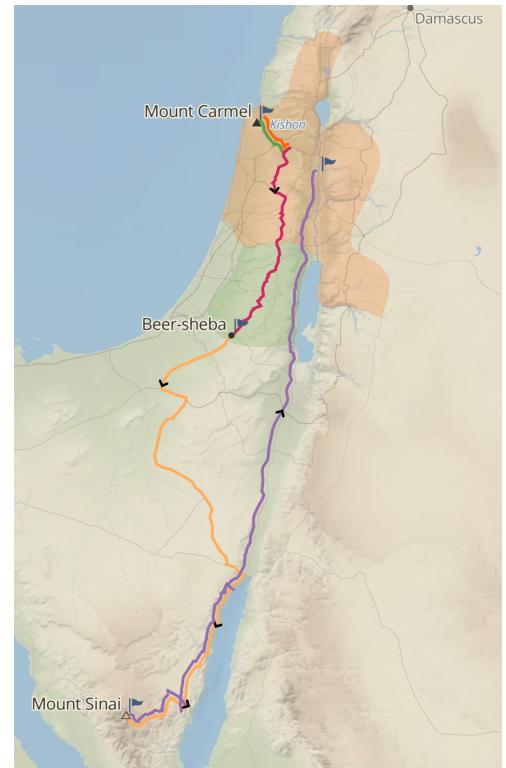
Recall that due to Israel's following after Baal, the Lord withheld the rain (1Kings 17.1). However, He was still providing for Elijah, His faithful prophet (1Kings 17.3-9). First, the Lord provided for him at the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan River. And when the drought became so severe that the brook dried up, the Lord sent Elijah to Sidon. And if being provided food by a raven wasn't impressive enough, the Lord would use a poor widow to provide for His prophet at Zarephath. The point: the Lord could provide for His faithful no matter where they were or how dire the circumstances!

But what about when faithfulness to the Lord led to severe consequences... even to having your life threatened? This lesson looks at how the Lord provided for Elijah once Jezebel swore that she would end Elijah's life (1Kings 19.2).



NOTES FROM THE TEXT...

- Vs. 2, the names of the protagonists are worthy noting: Jezebel means "where is the prince (Baal)?" whereas Elijah means "Yahweh is my God"
- Vs. 3, Beersheba was located in the far south of Judah, thus well beyond the reach of Ahab.
- Vs. 4
 - » The juniper or broom-tree can grow to a height of 10 feet and is the only shade in this wilderness.
 - » Compare Elijah's complaint to that of Moses in Numbers 11.15. One commentator speculates that "Elijah exhibited symptoms of manic depression, wishing for death, together with loss of appetite, an inability to manage and with excessive self-pity." (Tyndale)
- Vss. 5-6, the Lord's care for Elijah is similar to what He



had provided for the prophet in 1Kings 17.2-16.

- Vs. 8, Horeb (Mt. Sinai) lay ~ 250 south of Beersheba. The 40 days makes a parallel with Moses (Exodus 24.18) and later on with Christ (Matthew 4.2).
- Vs. 9, some speculate that the cave was the same “cleft” where the Lord appeared to Moses (Exodus 33.22). The Lord’s question is similar to the question He asked of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3.9). It provides Elijah with the opportunity to reflect and even confess.
- Vss. 11-12
 - » The wind, earthquake and fire hearkens back to the Lord’s appearance at Sinai when He entered a covenant with Israel (Exodus 19.16). These were also classic features of theophanies (divine appearances) in various cultures, particularly at times of war.
 - » So, the “sound of a gentle blowing” is meant to be juxtaposed against the mighty demonstrations of God’s power. “Here it is made plain to Elijah that Yahweh is not simply a hot- blooded warrior defending or dethroning kings on an arbitrary whim like the gods of the ancient Near East. He has an agenda for history. His warfare is not just wrathful blood-letting—there is a long-term plan that is being carefully worked out. Once all the fire and storm and earthquake are past, the plan can be articulated. The “gentle whisper” in verse 12 is not describing how the Lord speaks. It is descriptive of the resonating silence after all the clamor of destruction. It is with silence hanging in the air that Yahweh’s voice of direction may be heard.” (IVPB-BC)
- Vss. 15-17
 - » Undoubtedly, the episode at Mount Carmel had convinced Elijah that Jehovah’s cause had won, but the threats by Jezebel had shattered that hope. The Lord’s message in this passage would reassure Elijah that Jehovah would be victorious over Baal and Ahab, and He would be victorious using men other than Elijah!
 - » Hazael would be the most powerful king of Aram, taking away much of Israel’s territory (see 2Kings 10.32-33). Jehu would purge Israel of Ahab’s dynasty (2Kings 9.14-10.28). Elisha would carry on the prophetic work of Elijah.
- Vs. 18, Not only would the Lord use others to carry out His will, Elijah is now told that he is NOT the only one still faithful to Jehovah (cf. vss. 10,14).
- Vs. 19
 - » The 12 pair of oxen show that Elisha’s family was well off. He was leaving much to follow Elijah.
 - » Throwing the mantle on Elisha was a call to follow in the prophetic work.
- Vs. 20, Elisha is allowed to go to his home. Contrast with Luke 9.61-62, where perhaps the Lord is showing how much more important it was to follow Him.



TAKEAWAYS

In Matthew 6.25-34 Jesus exhorted His disciples to not worry about what they would eat, drink or wear. The reason? Because their heavenly Father already knew what they need-

ed and if they would “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” they would have all of those things. The Lord providing for Elijah during the drought (1Kings 17.1-16) and on his journey to Horeb (1Kings 19.4-8) is further proof that our Father can and will provide for His people. Yet, it’s not just basic necessities that the Lord provides for His people. Consider that the Lord also provided encouragement and purpose for Elijah (1Kings 19.15-18). Elijah may have believed that he alone was faithful, but no there were 7000 more! Elijah may have worried that Israel was destined to reject the Lord forever, but the Lord had a plan! Elijah left Horeb strengthened; the Lord had provided.

And perhaps we should appreciate that the Lord’s plan being fulfilled is the greatest way He can provide for His people. The crux of the Lord’s message to Elijah was that Hazael, Jehu and Elisha would help fulfill the Lord’s plan. Elijah needed to hear and know this, so that he could regain courage. Perhaps the greatest provision the Lord can make for us is to let us know His plan will be accomplished (Revelation 2.10).



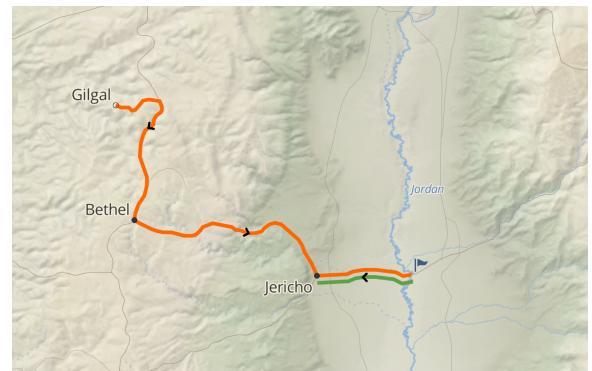
THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 5: JEHOVAH PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE (2KINGS 2)

We can't know for sure how long Elijah's prophetic work lasted. Ahab reigned over Israel for 22 years (1Kings 16.29) and his son Ahaziah reigned for 2 (1Kings 22.51). Assuming that Elijah began his ministry near the beginning of Ahab's reign and that his ministry concluded shortly after the death of Ahaziah, Elijah would have served as God's spokesman to the tribes of Israel for 20-25 years. We've already seen how the Lord provided for Elijah during his ministry (see 1Kings 17.4-9; 19.4-8), but how would Jehovah provide for His faithful servant once his ministry was concluded? And how would the Lord provide for Elijah's successor, Elisha?

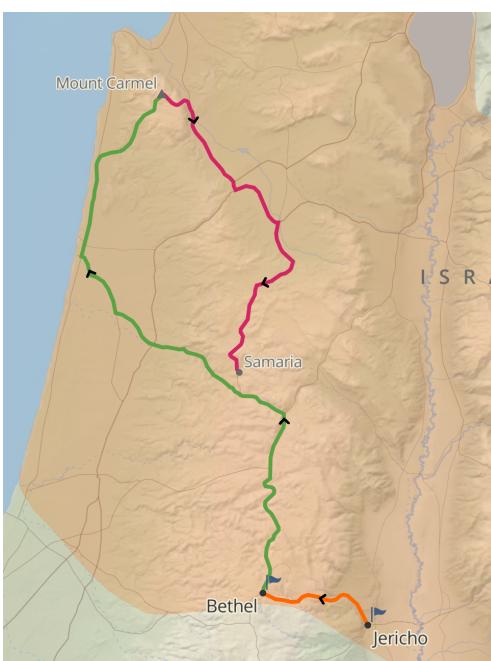
NOTES FROM THE TEXT...

- Vs. 1, while the best known Gilgal was located between Jericho and the Jordan River (Joshua 4.19-20), it would seem that this Gilgal was located north of Bethel.
- Vs. 2, the significance of Bethel, "house of God", went back to the days of the patriarchs (see Genesis 28.17-19). But more recently, it was the location for one of Jeroboam's calf shrines (1Kings 12.27-29). Bethel lay near the border of Israel and Judah.
- Vs. 3, we'd certainly like to know more about the "sons of the prophets" than we do. In fact, about all we know is that such groups existed (see also 2Kings 4.1,38; 5.22). The term "son" here likely doesn't refer to biological descent, but to membership in a guild. Thus, these men were apprentices in training to serve as God's messengers. It's clear from the text that they had received the same revelation (that Elijah would be taken up), that Elijah and Elisha had received.
- Vs. 6, the Jordan River lay about 5 miles to the east of Jericho. This would have been the same area where Joshua and Israel had crossed (see Joshua 3).
- Vs. 8, so far in our study we've seen several parallels between Elijah and Moses. Here we see another where Elijah takes the symbol of his office (his mantle) and uses it to part the waters of the Jordan, much as Moses had used his staff to part the waters of the Red Sea (see Exodus 14.21-22).
- Vs. 9, Elisha's request for a "double portion" does not mean he desired double the power of Elijah. Rather, this is the language of inheritance where the eldest son would receive a double portion of the inheritance (see Deuteronomy 21.15-17 and note Elisha's use of "father" in addressing Elijah in vs. 12.)
- Vs. 10, Elijah's response shows that Elisha's request was not within his power, for it is the Lord who gives the Spirit (see John 3.34). However, strong faith that the Lord would fulfill



the request is also demonstrated.

- Vs. 11
 - » Some speculate that Elijah and Elisha traveled as far as Mount Nebo where Moses died. This would have been 10 miles east of the Jordan. Of course, we cannot know for sure.
 - » Once again, God's power is demonstrated with a demonstration of fire, perhaps in mockery of the storm god Baal. These chariots of fire would later stand in protection of Elisha and his servant Gehazi (2Kings 6.17) and here they show the Lord's protection for His faithful servant even as he is being taken up into heaven.
- Vs. 12, note that king Joash will say the same when Elisha is about to die (2Kings 13.14).
- Vss. 13-15, Elisha had requested the inheritance of the spirit and his crossing back over on dry ground would seem to indicate that this request had been granted.



- Vss. 16-17, their insistence was likely born out of a concern over the dishonor of a corpse lying unburied and by the fact that Elijah had once before disappeared (see 1Kings 18.12).

- Vss. 19-22

- » This episode and the one following demonstrate that Elisha had received the spirit. This account is in connection with the ability to bless, the following with the ability to curse. "The first event confirming the anointing of Elisha demonstrates the power of prophetic blessing to those who affirm the prophet. The second event demonstrates the power of a curse that rests on all who deny him." (NIVAC)
- » We are not given a reason why the water was bad, but it could have been connected with the curse set on Jericho (see Joshua 6.26).
- » If the water was bad because of the curse associated with the city, then Elisha's use of salt would have symbolized the purification that the Lord could bring.

- » Elisha's ability to bring the Lord's blessing on the waters marks him as yet another type of Moses, who had also "healed" the waters at Marah (see Exodus 15.22-26).
- Vss. 23-24
 - » The taunting at Bethel may have been because that city was now the center of pagan calf-worship.
 - » Elijah was a hairy man (see 2Kings 1.8) so Elisha's baldness may have suggested to some that he didn't possess the same power as his predecessor.
 - » It is significant that Elisha's curse was "in the name of the Lord". These youths had dishonored God's prophet, and thus had dishonored the Lord Himself (cf. Deuteronomy 18.19)
- Vs. 25, it was 12 miles from Jericho to Bethel; 75 miles from Bethel to Mount Carmel; 40 miles from Mount Carmel to Samaria.

TAKEAWAYS

In our last lesson we noted a real low point in the life of Elijah: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." (1Kings 19.4). Surely there were many low points during Elijah's ministry, but he would faithfully continue doing the work of his Lord. But for what hope? This chapter answers that question, as Elijah is taken up to heaven. Perhaps that was why the event happened on the eastern side of the Jordan River, outside of the Promised Land. Israel had rejected her God and the Promised Land would soon be depopulated (see 2Kings 17). Thus, the Lord takes Elijah out of the Promised Land in order to take him to the true inheritance. "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:16, NASB95)

We also noted in this lesson that Elisha requested a double portion of Elijah's spirit (vs. 9). In effect, Elisha was requesting the power necessary to fulfill the mission the Lord had laid on him (see 1Kings 19.15-17). The Lord provided Elisha with the power he needed, the power to both bless (vss. 19-22) and the power to curse (vss. 23-24). We serve a God who provides all we need to accomplish His work (see Ephesians 4.11-13; 6.10-11).



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 6: JEHOVAH PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE (2KINGS 4,8)

So far in our study we have noted God's provision for His faithful servants Elijah and Elisha. The Lord not only provided necessities like food (1Kings 17.3-6), but also with purpose (1Kings 19.15-18) and the means to accomplish His work (2Kings 2.15ff.). And ultimately, the Lord provided a reward for their faithfulness (2Kings 2.11). However, Elijah and Elisha were not the only Israelites who remained faithful to Jehovah. Remember, the Lord declared there were "7,000 in Israel... that have not bowed to Baal" (1Kings 19.18), and He was providing for them as well.

2Kings 4 & 8 consist of several accounts where we see God providing for His people. Significantly, some of these episodes occurred during times of famine (see 4.38; 8.1), a time when Israel was being punished for her unfaithfulness to the Lord (see Deuteronomy 28.23-24). The Lord always knows those who belong to Him, and He always cares for them!

NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

The widow's oil (4.1-7)

- Vs. 1
 - » "Because of the fragile nature of the environment in much of the ancient Near East, farmers and small landowners often found themselves in debt. Their problems could magnify if a drought and resulting poor harvests continued over more than one year, and they could be forced to sell their land, goods and eventually even their family and themselves into debt slavery. Israelite law takes this situation into account by providing a fair period of labor service to the creditor as well as a time limit on servitude for the debt slave. No one could serve more than six years, and when slaves were freed they went out debt-free. This would have been a good solution for some, but without their land to return to, many may have chosen to remain in the service of their creditor or to move to the cities to find jobs or to join the military." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
 - » The Law regulated the length of time a Hebrew could serve as a slave and their treatment (Exodus 21.2-3; Leviticus 25.39). Unsurprisingly, Israel violated God's law in this matter (see Amos 2.6; 8.6).
 - » According to Josephus and the Targums, this widow was the wife of Ahab's servant Obadiah (see 1Kings 18.3-4). "The cause of the debt is that Obadiah borrowed money for the maintenance of the prophets while in hiding. After he died his widow and her children are in danger of being carried off into slavery." (NIV Application Commentary)
 - » The Law prescribed that an Israelite could redeem his kinsman out of servitude (see Leviticus 25.47-55). It would seem that this widow was asking Elisha to provide this service for his fellow prophet.

- Vs. 7, this story confirms that God does not fail the widow and the fatherless (see Deuteronomy 10.18).

Death in the pot (4.38-41)

- Vs. 38, this Gilgal would be the same one referenced in 2Kings 2.1, not the one near Jericho (see Joshua 4.19)
- Vs. 39, "The poisonous ingredient is generally considered the yellow gourds known as colocynths, popularly referred to today as apples of Sodom. They can be fatal." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 41, for God's faithful, the harmful has become innocuous. See Luke 10.19.



Feeding the 100 (4.42-44)

- Vs. 42
 - » Baal Shalishah was located in the Sharon plain, north of Lydda.
 - » The first fruits were to be given to the priest (Leviticus 23.10), so the fact that they were given to Elisha in this account not only reflects his role as God's representative, but likely reflects the status of the priesthood during this time.
- Vss. 43-44, note the similarities between this miracle and the Lord feeding the 5000 (Matthew 14.13-21) and the 4000 (Matthew 15.32-38).

The Shunammite woman (4.8-37; 8.1-6)

- 4.8, "Shunem (modern Solem) lay about eleven kilometres south of Mount Tabor, eight kilometres from Jezreel and thirty-two kilometres from Carmel (cf. v. 25), and so near a route likely to have been used frequently." (Tyndale)
- 4.13, Elisha's offer may indicate that he had gained political influence, possibly as a result of his involvement during the Moabite campaign (see 2Kings 3).
- 4.14, a son would be needed to maintain the family property.
- 4.21, the woman's actions may reflect faith that Elisha would be able to restore her son.
- 4.23, new moons, as well as Sabbaths, were times when all work ceased (see Amos 8.5; cf. Numbers 28.11-15), thus providing opportunity to consult God's prophets.
- 4.25, the distance from Shunem to Mount Carmel was ~20 miles.
- 4.28, compare with the woman at Zarephath (1Kings 17.18).
- 4.29, perhaps it was hoped that the staff of Elisha could effect a miracle, similar to Moses' staff (Exodus 4.1-4; 17.5-6) or this was done in the assurance that Elisha was

coming.

- 4.35, I don't necessarily subscribe to this thinking, but it is of interest: "In Mesopotamian incantation literature the touching of part to part is a means by which demons exercise power over their intended victims—it is the idiom of possession. In this belief, vitality or life force can be transferred from one body to the other by contact of each part. By imitating the procedure believed to be used by demons, the prophet is able, through the power of Yahweh (notice the prayer), to drive the demons out and restore the boy's life." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 8.1, we cannot know exactly when this famine occurred and if it was in relation to the famines mentioned in 4.38; 6.24-7.20. Famines served as punishment for unfaithfulness and as calls to repentance (1Kings 17.1; Haggai 1.6-11).
- 8.2, "Though Samaria typically experiences slightly more rainfall per year than the southern coastal plain (land of the Philistines), the alluvial flood plain of the coast is less dependent on the rainfall and would be the logical area to try to weather a famine." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 8.3, it is possible that the king or a member of his family had taken possession of her home, but regardless it was the king's responsibility to maintain justice, thus she makes her appeal to him.
- 8.4, "The king (v. 4) is not named, and since Gehazi is in the royal presence it may be assumed that this was before his dismissal as Elisha's servant (5:27). If so, the king might be Jehu, for J(eh)oram knew Elisha well (3:13)." (Tyndale)

TAKEAWAYS:

The story of the Shunammite woman and her son (4.8-37) makes the point of the Lord giving (vs. 16), the Lord taking away (vss. 18-20), but then the Lord giving again (vss. 32-37). We might argue that responsibility for the boys' death should not be laid at the Lord's feet, but it would seem that the woman believed this (vs. 28) and this would be in keeping with the Jews' understanding of death. So Job declared that what the Lord gives, He takes away (Job 1.21) and the Psalmist's declaration that it is the Lord who "take away their spirit, they expire and return to the dust (Psalm 104.30). Regardless of our understanding of the Lord's role in the death of men, the point of this account is that the Lord provides even in death... He provides life again. And this provision is the hope we cherish (1Corinthians 15.20ff).

These episodes also reflect the Lord's ability to abundantly provide for His faithful ones. The widow is not only blessed with enough oil to pay her debt, but enough to provide a living for her and her sons (4.7). Likewise, the 20 loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain are enough to feed 100 with some being left over (4.42-44). These episodes foreshadow some of the same works of Jesus while on this earth, namely feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14.13-21) and of the 4000 (Matthew 15.32-38). These signs showing His ability to provide abundance serve as proof of His claim that "I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10.10). In Him, we continue to experience His abundant provision as we are blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1.3).



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 7: JEHOVAH JUDGES HIS PEOPLE (1KINGS 20)

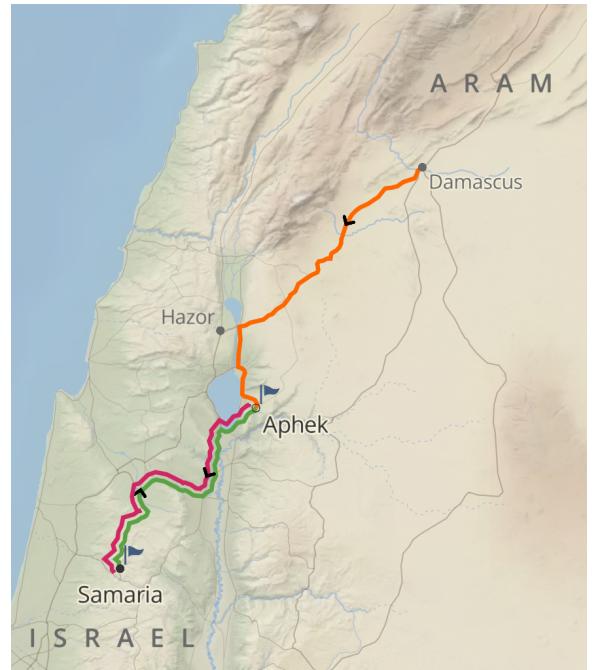
The days of Elijah and Elisha was a time when Israel forsook her Lord for other gods. They did this in spite of Jehovah revealing Himself to be the one, true God (1Kings 19) and in spite of the fact that the Lord had provided for her in the past, and continued to do so for His faithful ones. And because Israel had rejected the Lord as her God, she would be judged by Him! Our study began with one of God's judgments on Israel, when He proclaimed a drought by His servant Elijah (1Kings 17.1). More significant for this and future lessons are the Lord's words to Elijah in 1Kings 19.15-17, "The Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death." The Lord's judgment on Israel was coming, and He would utilize various men to bring that judgment about.

1Kings 20 recounts two wars Israel had with Aram (Syria) during the reign of Ahab. While Israel would be victorious in these battles, they foreshadow the judgment which was swiftly coming on the house of Ahab and ultimately on all of Israel. Beginning with this chapter, Aram becomes a thorn in Israel's side. The king of Aram may have set his sights on Israel for a couple of reasons: first, Ahab's alliance with Phoenicia (see 1Kings 16.31) may have restricted the Arameans access to the lucrative trade markets of Phoenicia. Second, the Assyrian empire was growing during the reign of Shalmaneser III (859-829 BC) and this likely meant that Aram had little prospect of expanding to the north. Thus, they looked to the south and to Israel.

NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

- Vs. 1:
 - » Ben-Hadad, "Aramean history at this time is still in need of much clarification, with at least part of the problem caused by several rulers with the name of Ben-Hadad ("son of [the god] Hadad")... The first Ben-Hadad has been referred to earlier in chapter 15 and ruled during the first part of the ninth century, though no precise dating is possible. In 2 Kings 8 the king murdered by Hazael (about 842) is named Ben-Hadad, and Hazael is later succeeded by a king named Ben-Hadad." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
 - » 32 kings, "These kings were not heads of state but tribal chieftains who roamed with semi-independence in the area of Damascus. Damascus was a great oasis southeast of the southern extremity of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range. Tribesman of the north Arabian steppe roamed and settled in the area of Damascus. The title "king of Aram" (v. 1) refers to the control Ben-Hadad has in mustering these chieftains against Ahab. Aram is an ethnic rather than a geographic term, and the "kings" are rulers of various tribes or confederacies." (NIV Application Commentary)

- Vs. 3,
 - » "Such was the case in Esarhaddon's and Ashurbanipal's destruction of enemy kingdoms: 'I carried off his wife, his children, the personnel of his palace, gold, silver ... many valuables.' The Egyptian victors did the same. Amenhotep II boasts of seizing wives, children, animals, and 'all of their property without end.'" (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
 - » "The resulting vassal relationship would involve members of Ahab's family being taken as hostages to insure that the terms were met. Assyrian practice of this time was to take princes hostage to provide incentive that good behavior would result, and here the Arameans are doing the same." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 12, it is thought by many that rather than Ben-Hadad being right outside the walls of Samaria, he and his troops were based in Succoth in the Jordan Valley (the word is similar to the word translated "temporary shelter")
- Vs. 15, the 7000 would not have been all the fighting men in Israel, but could have been all who were readily available. Point is that the Lord does not rely on numbers (see Judges 7.2)
- Vs. 22,
 - » "turn of the year" would be during the spring, the usual time for military expeditions.
 - » "The Arameans would be unsatisfied with their geographical limitations until better access to the ports of the Mediterranean were secured. Israel alone stood in their way, and hence the Arameans would engage in battle again, next time in more favorable terrain closer to the Damascus heartland." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 23, this was in keeping with pagan beliefs that deities were localized. Samaria, located in the hill country, was protected by a god of the hills, or so they thought.
- Vs. 24,
 - » "The tactics that will be used for the second campaign are significantly different. In the first round the Aramean coalition attacked Samaria directly. This was intended as siege warfare. In the second phase the emphasis was not on starving the people out or on breaching the walls of a city, but on pitched battle in open terrain where the Arameans intended to take full advantage of their chariotry and cavalry. Whether because of the different battle tactics or because of the failure of the first campaign, the Arameans assigned a new group of field commanders and filled the ranks with new recruits." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
 - » "The Aramean king is advised to abandon the ineffective alliances with area chieftains and bring his military forces directly under his control, with officials he appoints himself. He further needs to tally a force equal to the troops and cavalry that desert him." (NIV Application Commentary)



- Vs. 31, “Ben-Hadad is left with no alternative but to appeal to treaty loyalty, which he expects from Ahab (20:31). ‘Merciful’ is a covenant term denoting loyalty to a relationship. Submission, made evident in their garments, is the basis of appeal to someone who can respect agreements. Course black cloth attached to the waist is a sign of penitence, a sign of suspension of normal activities to focus on critical relational matters. A rope on the head indicates servitude, either as a prisoner of war or as someone who has given up his rights to one who has the power of life and death.” (NIV Application Commentary)
- Vss. 32-33, “By referring to Ben-Hadad as his brother and taking him up into his chariot, Ahab is expressing his willingness to renegotiate their former relationship. It is likely that previously Ahab was considered a vassal to Ben-Hadad, in which case there would have been a suzerainty treaty between them. This would have required Ahab to pay tribute and be under the general authority of Aram. In this new “brother” relationship there would be a parity treaty between them that would not require tribute. It would put them on equal terms, providing mutual support militarily and opening up trade routes and merchant opportunities on an equal footing. Ahab’s leniency is seen in his settling for equal status rather than pushing his advantage to make Ben-Hadad his vassal.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 34, “One of the actions taken when a major city came under the control of a new king was to construct a marketplace for his merchants in a square set up in his honor. A colony of merchants would then take up residence in the city to carry on their trade.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 39, a talent of silver was ~ 100 times the price of a slave according to the Law (Exodus 21:32).
- Vs. 40, interesting that Ahab who had just shown mercy to Ben-Hadad his foe, has no mercy for his own.
- Vs. 42, “The doctrine of ‘holy war’—wars where God acts as the warrior in defeating the enemy—requires that the spoils belong entirely to God (as at Jericho, cf. Josh. 6:18). A prisoner in such a case cannot be treated as common property; anything so devoted cannot be sold or redeemed by substituting something else (cf. Lev. 27:28; Deut. 7:2; 20:16–17). According to prophetic theology, the Aramean king is under such a ban (1 Kings 20:42), and it is not Ahab’s prerogative to make a treaty with him.” (NIV Application Commentary)

TAKEAWAYS:

Twice Ahab was told that the Lord would grant him victory so that he would “know that I am the Lord” (vss. 13,28). Clearly, the Arameans did not know the Lord, for they thought he was localized deity (vs. 23), but the tragedy is that Israel did not know the Lord either. It is interesting that during the Exodus, the Lord repeatedly acted so that Israel would “know that I am the Lord”...

- this was to be Moses’ message to Israel (Exodus 6.7)
- the plagues were so the Egyptians and Israelites would know that Jehovah is the Lord (Exodus 7.5,17; 10.2)
- the Red Sea crossing would confirm that Jehovah is the Lord (Exodus 14.18)
- Israel was fed daily with bread from heaven so they could “know that I am the Lord” (Exodus 16.12)

Yet, during the days of Elijah Israel did not know that Jehovah was Lord (see 1Kings 18.36), and even though the Lord gave Ahab victory twice, his treaty with Ben-hadad proved that he still didn't know the Lord. Tragically, Israel would finally come to understand that Jehovah is Lord, but it would take captivity for them to finally grasp the lesson (Ezekiel 6)



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 8: JEHOVAH JUDGES HIS PEOPLE (1KINGS 21)

In our study of 1Kings 20 we noted that even though Ahab was twice victorious in battle against Ben-hadad of Aram, the chapter sets up God's judgment against the Israelite king. He could have learned the vital lesson that Jehovah is the Lord (1Kings 20.13,28) and that allegiance to Him would grant safety and security, but instead Ahab was content with an alliance with the Syrian king (1Kings 20.34). As a result, the Lord declared that "your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people" (1Kings 20.42). The chapter concluded with the king of Israel returning to his capital "sullen and vexed," perhaps setting up the events of chapter 21. Was Ahab seeking to purchase Naboth's vineyard as a means of cheering himself? Interestingly, Ahab who had just shown himself as merciful to the Arameans, would show himself as a despot to his people.

1Kings 21.25 declares, "surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife incited him." This statement is made immediately following their treachery in dealing with Naboth, and to better understand their treachery we must first understand the importance of the land to Israel. First, the land was the inheritance of Israel and was divided first by tribes then by individual families in each tribe (Numbers 26.52-56). And since the land was their inheritance, it was not to be transferred from one tribe to another (Numbers 36.7-8). Finally, consider the Lord's words in Leviticus 25.23, "'The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.'" The Lord went on to provide for how the land could be redeemed (vss. 24-28), but His point was clear: it was His land and the promised inheritance of His people. And what He had provided for His people should remain theirs. Thus, Ahab and Jezebel didn't just commit murder and theft, they deprived Naboth and his family of their rightful inheritance. And they would be judged for it!

NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

- Vs. 1
 - » Jezreel was ~ 23 miles from Samaria. "The site of Jezreel has a commanding view of the Jezreel Valley's eastern bay. From there one can see the Carmel range to the west, the central mountains of Ephraim to the south, as well as Mount Gilboa and the heights of Gilead to the east—most of the territory in Ahab's kingdom. The city's low elevation made it an ideal spot for the winter palace of the Omride dynasty." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary)
 - » "Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel" the language here emphasizes that this land was part of his inheritance. The land is in Jezreel, Naboth was from Jezreel.
- Vs. 2, Israel's king should have protected the rights of the people (see Deuteronomy 17.14-20), but God revealed that their kings would oppress them (1Samuel 8.14). Ahab's request smacks of the latter.

- Vs. 3, see Numbers 26.52-56; Leviticus 25.23-28.
- Vss. 5-7, Jezebel the daughter of the Sidonian king (1Kings 16.31) was not accustomed to a king being refused by a citizen. She fashions Israel into a despotic kingdom. “This passage is believed to represent a true distinction between the rights extended to the king in Israel and those current in Phoenicia. Differences involve issues concerning (1) the ultimate ownership of land and (2) the absolute power of the king. In the first category, Israelites believed that all the land was Yahweh’s land, while the Phoenicians would have seen land as royal fiefdoms—all land was on grant from the king. In the second category, Israelite kingship was designed to be less despotic than most monarchies—the king was not above the law. Jezebel would not have been accustomed to such niceties.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vss. 9-14
 - » A fast would be proclaimed during difficult times or in times of mourning (see 2Chronicles 20.3-4). Perhaps this was proclaimed in relation to a time of famine.
 - » “The prominent seating of Naboth would reflect his status in the community and sets him up for the contention that his actions were capable of affecting the entire community. The two false witnesses are seated near him so that they can claim to have heard his words.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
 - » “Isaiah 8:21 features the combination of cursing both God and king in the context of fixing blame for hardship or crisis. As the community is being led in this fast to seek the cause of their crisis, these two planted witnesses claim that they heard Naboth fixing blame for the crisis on God and the king.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
 - » “worthless men” = sons of Belial, see 2Corinthians 6.15.
- Vs. 18, “Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria” doesn’t mean that Ahab was currently in Samaria, rather that was the seat of his power.
- Vs. 19, the fulfillment of this prophecy occurred in stages. First, Ahab’s blood was licked up by dogs (1Kings 22.38), but then his son Joram was cast on this ground (2Kings 9.25-26).
- Vs. 20, Ahab had broken two of the ten commandments by coveting his neighbor’s land (Exodus 20.17) and by committing murder (Exodus 20.13).
- Vs. 23, see 2Kings 9.30-37.
- Vs. 29, not the only occasion where repentance temporarily deferred punishment (see Jonah 3.10).

TAKEAWAYS:

1. **Justice will be done... ultimately.** Ahab should have upheld justice in Israel, but tragically he was the source of injustice. Naboth was powerless to stop the treachery committed by Ahab, Jezebel and their willing accomplices. Yet, Jehovah’s pronouncement of judgment on Ahab, Jezebel and all their descendants emphasizes the fact that the Lord will ultimately execute justice (vss. 19-24).
2. **The mercy of God.** The mercifulness of God is exhibited throughout Scripture, but who would think He would exhibit mercy to Ahab? Yet, that exactly what the Lord did when Ahab exhibited contrition (vss. 27-29). Truly, the Lord does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2Peter 3.9).

3. **An inheritance that cannot be taken away.** As we noted at the beginning of the lesson, the treachery of Ahab and Jezebel extended beyond theft and murder; they deprived Naboth and his family of their rightful inheritance (see Numbers 26.52-56; Leviticus 25.23). Praise God that we have obtained “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1Peter 1.4).



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 9: JEHOVAH JUDGES HIS PEOPLE (1KINGS 22)

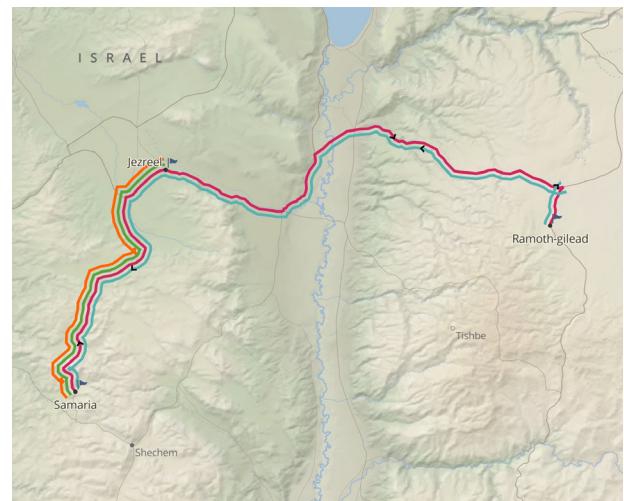
In foreseeing the day when His people would request a king to rule over them, the Lord gave a series of instructions to Israel's future rulers. Those instructions culminated with the command for the king to write a copy of the law and to "read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel." (Deuteronomy 17.19-20). Tragically, most of Israel's kings would not be faithful to Jehovah's commandments, thus their descendants would not rule long over Israel. This was true of...

- Saul (1Samuel 13.13-14)
- Solomon (his descendants would continue to reign, but part of the kingdom was taken away, 1Kings 11.11-13)
- Jeroboam (1Kings 14.10-11)
- Baasha (1Kings 16.2-4)

In our past few studies we've noted how God's judgment was impending for Ahab and his house. As Elijah prophesied, the Lord would "bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin. Of Jezebel also has the Lord spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat." (1Kings 21.21-24). In this lesson and the next we will see how God's judgment came upon Ahab and would ultimately come upon all Israel.

NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

- Vs. 1, "It is generally assumed that the reason their alliance remained strong was because of the threat of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III who was making his way westward. He finally posed a threat to southern Aram in 853, where he was met by a coalition of twelve western nations at the Battle of Qarqar. Shalmaneser lists Ahab of Israel and Hadadezer of Damascus as two of the most significant parties in the alliance which was led by Iarhuleni of Hamath. Qarqar is on the Orontes River about 150 miles north of Damascus, but only



25 miles north of Hamath. Though Shalmaneser claims victory, study of subsequent history suggests that the western coalition succeeded in their major objective. It was not until ten or twelve years later, after the confederacy had eroded, that Shalmaneser finally shows any indication of control in the region. It is most likely the general success against Shalmaneser that gave Ahab the confidence to take military action against the Arameans and try to regain Ramoth Gilead." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

- Vs. 2, note that Jehoshaphat was allied with Ahab by marriage (2Chronicles 18.1), having taken the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah, to be the wife of his son Jehoram (2Chronicles 21.6).
- Vs. 3
 - » Note 1Kings 20.34. Ben-hadad had not been faithful to his promise.
 - » "Ramoth Gilead (Tell Ramith, thirty-six miles north of Amman, Jordan) was occupied by Israelites when they arrived in Transjordan. It was an all-important city on the Transjordanian highway that connected Arabia and Aram. From this site a convenient ridge descended to the Jordan Valley and over to Jezreel and Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley. The Aramean conquest of the city represents yet another volley in their trade war with Israel and shows that the treaty of Aphek did not last very long at all." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 6, likely that these false prophets based their prophecies on Ahab's past victories (see 1Kings 20.13,28).
- Vs. 8
 - » Micaiah means "who is like Yahweh?"
 - » Possible that he was the prophet who rebuked Ahab in 1Kings 20.42.
- Vss. 11-12, note that Zedekiah and the other prophets claimed to speak for Jehovah (the LORD).
- Vs. 17, "like sheep which have no shepherd" depicts a lack of leadership that results in ruin (see Numbers 27.16-17; Zech. 13.7; Matthew 9.36; 26.31). It could be argued that Israel was already without a shepherd in that they were not following their true Shepherd (cf. Psalm 23).
- Vss. 19-23, this passage is admittedly difficult as on the surface it would seem to contradict such passages as James 1.13.
 - » These considerations from the New American Commentary may be helpful:
 - * First, Micaiah clearly shapes his account of the lying spirit as a denunciation of the four hundred prophets. These are not faithful and sincere prophets of the Lord but court prophets on the king's payroll who live to please him. They are in striking contrast to the prophets of the Lord mentioned in 1 Kgs 18:1-15 who must be hidden to survive. Israel has "no master," and Ahab has only lying prophets. Micaiah's words are certainly taken as an insult by Zedekiah and Ahab.
 - * Second, it is difficult to call the Lord a liar in the story when he announces before Ahab goes to battle that a lying spirit has been placed in the prophets' mouths. God warns the king through Micaiah not to listen to these prophets, but "he let himself be deceived to fight against Ramoth, he was killed in action in spite of the precautions he took, and lost the city to the Arameans." Ahab should have known from past experience that the solitary prophet may well speak for God.
 - * Third, as in earlier difficult passages in the former prophets (e.g., 1 Sam 16:13-14;

2 Sam 24:1–17) this text focuses on God's sovereignty. Nothing escapes the Lord's notice, and no one operates outside of the Lord's jurisdiction.

- » Also, it may be that this imagery is chosen as it fits the religious traditions that Ahab favored: "These images fit comfortably within the religious traditions of the Egypt, Syrian, and Mesopotamia, where the gods are seen as sitting in their heavenly council before the throne of El." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary).
- » Finally, consider this from James Smith: "Prophetic visions are anthropomorphic. They do not always correspond to reality. Such visions are the vehicle used to convey a cardinal truth to the mind of the prophet. In this case the truth is that Ahab's death in battle had been foreordained in the counsels of God, and that divine wisdom had devised a means for accomplishing this goal... Ahab wished to be guided by false prophets. The justice of God permitted him to be so guided."
- » My conclusion: As James Smith points out, not everything from a vision is to be taken as concrete reality. Consider the visions of the Lord in heaven found in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4-5. Are we to conclude this is actually what heaven is like, or are we to understand fundamental truths of God's glory and majesty? I believe it is the former. In the prophecy here, the point is that the Lord had already determined that Ahab and his house would be destroyed (see 1Kings 21.21-24). God was going to bring that to pass and allowed Ahab to be deceived by his own prophets, something Ahab was more than complicit in! Even upon hearing Micaiah's vision, Ahab is still unwilling to relent! He has chosen his path and his counselors; he will believe a lie and not Jehovah.

- Vs. 34, note again that the Lord had judged Ahab, there was no escaping His justice!
- Vs. 38, a partial fulfillment of 1Kings 21.21-24.

TAKEAWAYS:

1. **God will give us over.** We've already spent some time considering Micaiah's vision in vss. 19-23. Consider now some of Ahab's actions as they relate to this vision. First, he consulted numerous prophets, but excluded Micaiah because "I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." (vs. 8). Second, he refused to believe the vision and even punished Micaiah for his prophecy (vss. 26-27). Finally, Ahab tried to insure that the vision would not come true by disguising himself (vs. 30). But it was all for naught, Ahab would die and the Lord's judgment would come to pass! I cannot help but think that what Paul said was true of the Gentile world, that God gave them over (Romans 1.24,26,28) was also true of Ahab and can be true of us. His truth's are plain and are available for us to understand and follow. However, we can believe the lies of this world and tragically, He will give us over.
2. **Free will and the Lord's will.** Finally, I think vs. 34 makes an interesting point about free will and the Lord's will. None of the participants in this story are forced to take any of the actions they take (in fact, the Lord tries to discourage Ahab from taking these disastrous actions), but they happen nonetheless and ultimately bring about the Lord's will. A soldier fires an arrow at random and Ahab dies, bringing about God's justice. That is the greatness of our God, not that He forbids free will, but that He accomplishes His purposes regardless of the actions of men.



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 10: JEHOVAH JUDGES HIS PEOPLE (2KINGS 8-10)

In our last few lessons we have been tracing the fall of Ahab and his house as foretold by Elijah: "Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin. Of Jezebel also has the Lord spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat." (1Kings 21.21-24). In our last lesson we noted the death of Ahab, fulfilling a portion of this prophecy (1Kings 22.37-38), but for the rest of the prophecy to be fulfilled another portion of Scripture would have to be fulfilled.

Recall that when Elijah was despondent and appeared before the Lord at Mt. Horeb, the Lord gave him this commission: "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death." (1Kings 19.15-17) As we come to 2Kings 8.7, Elijah had anointed Elisha (1Kings 19) but had himself been called up to heaven (2Kings 2). Yet, Elisha would fulfill the commission by anointing both Hazael and Jehu. God's judgment would come upon Ahab's family, and upon all of Israel.

Note: given that this is a large portion of text, we will focus on a few main points from the passage.

THE RISE OF HAZAEL:

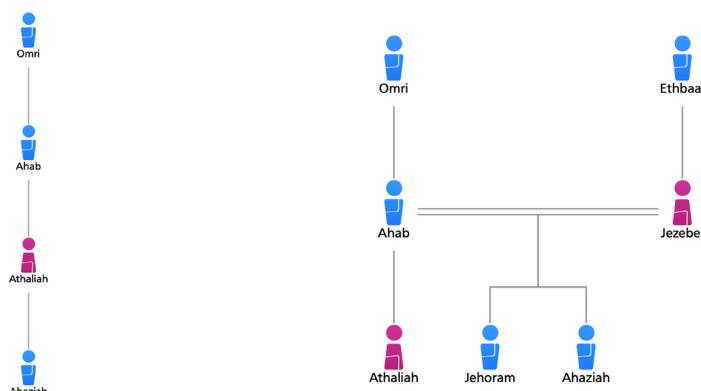
- "Hazael was a strong king of Aram (c. 843–796/7 bc). He is named in contemporary Assyrian records as the 'son of a nobody', i.e. his lineage is not recorded, probably as a commoner and not necessarily as a usurper. He seized the throne after the assassination of Ben Hadad II and was forced to pay a hundred talents of gold and a thousand talents of silver as tribute to Shalmaneser III of Assyria who besieged his capital Damascus" (Tyndale Bible Commentary)
- Vs. 8, interesting that Ben-hadad had more regard for God's prophet than Ahab demonstrated. Likely due to the curing of Naaman (2Kings 5).
- Vs. 10, this prophecy could be explained by the fact that Ben-hadad did not die from his sickness but was assassinated (vs. 15).
- Vs. 12, Hazael would inflict much damage to Israel (2Kings 8.28; 9.14; 10.32; 12.17-18; 13.3,22).

DISLIKE FOR THE DYNASTY OF AHAB?

- It could be that Ahab and his house were not well liked among the people of Israel. Note how many were willing to join in the uprising against his house:
 - » The servants of Ahab were quick to proclaim Jehu as king (9.13)
 - » The messengers of Joram fell-in behind Jehu (9.18-19)
 - » Officials of Jezreel threw Jezebel down to her death (9.32-33)
 - » The guardians of Ahab's 70 sons slew them and proclaimed Jehu as their king (10.1-11)
 - » Jehonadab joined himself to Jehu in order to eradicate the house of Ahab and the prophets of Baal (10.15ff)
- Yet, even though the people may have been against Ahab and his house, they were still not for Jehovah. They would continue in the sins of Jeroboam (10.28-31) and thus they would suffer judgment from God. First at the hands of Hazael (10.32-33), but ultimately from the hands of the Assyrians (2Kings 17).

DESTRUCTION OF AHAB'S FAMILY

- As we noted in our last lesson, the thrones of Israel and Judah were now intertwined. Jehoshaphat had allied himself with Ahab (2Chronicles 18.1) by taking Ahab's daughter as a bride for his son. Thus, when we come to 2Kings 9 both thrones were occupied by Ahab's descendants: Joram, son of Ahab, ruled in Israel and Ahaziah, grandson of Ahab (2Kings 8.25-27) reigned in Judah.
- Thus, Jehu's actions in 2Kings 9-10 show how he eradicated Ahab's house in both Israel and Judah.
 - » Jehu slew Joram, king of Israel (2Kings 9.14-26)
 - » Jehu slew Ahaziah, king of Judah (2Kings 9.27-28)
 - » Jezebel was thrown down to her death (2Kings 9.30-37)
 - » Ahab's 70 sons were slain (2Kings 10.1-11)
 - » Relatives of Ahaziah were slain (2Kings 10.12-14)
 - » Rest of Ahab's house in Samaria was slain (2Kings 10.15-17)
 - » Baal prophets were slain (2Kings 10.18-28)



THE TRAGEDY OF JEHU

- Jehu did much to please the Lord in executing His judgment, so he was rewarded with the promise that four generations of his sons would rule on the throne (10.30).
- However, Jehu did not follow the Lord with all of his heart: "But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel sin." (10.31)
- Thus, Hazael began to take pieces of the promised land away from Israel (10.32-33).
- The commission of Elijah in 1Kings 19.15-17 was fulfilled. Those who escaped from Jehu would be taken by Hazael. None of Israel would escape the Lord's justice.



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 11: JEHOVAH & THE NATIONS (2KINGS 3,6-7)

Our last several lessons have examined the judgment God brought on Ahab, his house and ultimately on all of Israel. God had foretold even before Israel entered the promised land that disobedience to the covenant would result in them being “defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.” (Deuteronomy 28.25). So, we shouldn’t be surprised to read that the Lord promised to use Hazael of Syria to execute His justice on Israel (1Kings 19.15-17). Yet, even though God was using the nations to judge His people, the passages we examine in this lesson show that Jehovah remained Sovereign over all the nations.

JEHOVAH SOVEREIGN OVER ARAM (2KINGS 6-7):

In our last lesson we noted how Hazael was “anointed” as the next king of Aram (2Kings 8.7-15) and how he began oppressing Israel (2Kings 10.32-33). The very fact that it was the Lord’s prophet Elisha who anointed Hazael as king shows that Jehovah remained in control of world affairs. And while the events of 2Kings 6-7 occurred before the anointing of Hazael, they further amplify the fact that Jehovah was sovereign over Aram.

Notes from the text:

- 6.13, Dothan is 10 miles north of Samaria, located on a main route leading into the Jezreel valley.
- 6.17, compare with what Elisha witnessed when Elijah was taken up into heaven (see 2.11-12).
- 6.22, captives would normally be made slaves, but in this case Elisha instructs the king to treat them as guests. Perhaps this was to make peace with the king of Aram, which it would seem temporarily occurred (note vs. 23).
- 6.25, we read in 1Kings 10.29 that a horse from Egypt would sell for 150 shekels of silver. The famine in Samaria was so bad that it required more than half the price of a horse to purchase a donkey’s head. Also, 5 shekels of silver was what the average worker could make in 6 months.
- 6.31, “In Israel the distinction was not always sharply drawn between the prophet as proclaimer and the prophet as instigator. This confusion occurs because the widespread belief in the ancient world still persisted in Israel that the utterance of words by skilled individuals had the power to coerce the gods to act accordingly. The Israelite king has decided that Elisha must have had some role in inducing Yahweh to take this action against Samaria.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 7.1, under normal circumstances a shekel could purchase 100 quarts of barley, but here it would only buy 15. Still, this is a drastic improvement from the conditions described in 6.25.

Takeaway: We've already noted that Israel was guilty of transgressing the covenant, thus God was bringing the judgment of the covenant on them. In this case, Aram was the Lord's tool to execute His judgment. However, these episodes revealed that Jehovah could still deliver His people from foreign oppression and more importantly, that He would protect His faithful servants. Elisha and his servant, along with other faithful followers of God, lived among a wicked people, a people that would ultimately be taken out of the land. Yet, God protected Elisha and his servant from the Aramean forces. These prefigures the many "remnant" promises found in the prophets, where God emphasized that He would continue to protect His faithful remnant (see Isaiah 28.5; 37.32; Micah 4.7; etc.). What a wonderful thought to consider, that though we live in a wicked world, the Lord still protects His remnant!

JEHOVAH SOVEREIGN OVER MOAB (2KINGS 3)

This chapter records an event that doesn't seem to have a lot of relevance to the main narrative regarding Israel during the time of Ahab's dynasty. The main connection is that the king of Moab chose to rebel after the death of Ahab, during the reign of Jehoram (vss. 1-5). However, taken in context with the rest of what Scripture records about Moab, this chapter emphasizes God's sovereignty over this nation.

Notes from the text:

- Historical notes regarding Moab from Scripture:
 - » Moab descended from Lot (Genesis 19.30-38)
 - » God would not allow Israel to attack Moab while they journeyed to Canaan (see Judges 11.12-28).
 - » Balak, king of Moab, employed Balaam to curse Israel while they were camped on the border of Moab (Numbers 22-24).
 - » Moab took opportunity to oppress Israel during the days of the Judges (Judges 3.12-30).
 - » Saul had military victories over Moab (1Samuel 14.47)
 - » David completely subjugated the Moabites (2Samuel 8.2).
 - » Solomon promoted the worship of the Moabite god, Chemosh, to please one of his wives (1Kings 11.7).
- 3.4, on the Moabite stone, Mesha boasts how we overthrew the rule of Israel: "Omri was the king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him, and he said — he too — "I will oppress Moab!" In my days did he say [so], but I looked down on him and on his house, and Israel has gone to ruin, yes, it has gone to ruin for ever!"
- 3.7, remember that Jehoshaphat was allied with Ahab's house (see 2Kings 8.16-18).
- 3.8, "The allies cannot easily come against Moab from the north because Mesha has fortified the Medeba plains north of the Arnon. As a result they march south through Jerusalem, Hebron and Arad, around the south end of the Dead Sea (through the desert of Edom) and come at Moab from an unexpected direction. The march from Samaria to Arad is about eighty-five miles. From there it may be as many as fifty more to Kir Haresheth if a fairly direct route is taken." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 3.13, "It is interesting that Joram does not disavow those prophets or the gods they serve, but only replies that Yahweh was the one who had instigated the campaign, so he must be dealt with. This may suggest that oracles had been sought from Yahweh by

this northern king and that the oracles had answered favorably concerning this military action, though, alternatively, the alliance may have taken shape only because Jehoshaphat consulted Yahweh concerning his involvement (see 2 Chron 18:4-7). This divine direction, however it came, is now interpreted by Joram as Yahweh's intention to bring about their destruction." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

- 3.17, "It is likely that the army was in the vicinity of the Wadi Zered. Like all wadis, Zered fills up seasonally with the runoff from the higher elevations. As a result, it can suddenly course with water even though no rain has been experienced at the lower elevations. The digging of pits in the wadi would be a means of capturing the runoff for their use lest it all surge right past them. Prophetic knowledge of rain in high elevations that would bring water into the area is also demonstrated by Deborah." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 3.25, "The ecological destruction was intended to cripple the economy for years. The springs and fields could eventually be cleared of stones, but needing to do so would make it a long, slow process to reestablish a productive agriculture. Sometimes springs would find other, less usable outlets and fields would be so damaged as to have greatly reduced fertility. The cutting down of trees would have even more devastating effects on the ecological balance. Not only would shade and wood supply be lost, but topsoil erosion would increase and the loss of forestation's contribution to the environment would accelerate the development of wasteland conditions. Some fruit trees (such as the date palm) take twenty years of growth before they become productive. Agricultural devastation and deforestation were typical tactics of invading armies seeking to punish those they conquered and as an attempt to hasten their surrender." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- 3.27, "The subsequent great fury against Israel could be taken as the Moabites' angry reaction which caused Israel to return (so Josephus, Ant. ix.3.2), the wrath of God turned against the alliance who had provoked such an action or, more likely, Israel's horror and dismay made them withdraw." (Tyndale)

Takeaway: Recall that when Balak, king of Moab, employed Balaam to curse Israel, Jehovah would not allow the seer to do so, but rather told him to issue a series of blessings. Of note was this prophecy uttered by Balaam:

"I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near;
A star shall come forth from Jacob,
A scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,
And tear down all the sons of Sheth." (Numbers 24.17)

It may be that this prophecy was originally fulfilled by David in 2 Samuel 8.2, but as the Moabite king's rebellion in this chapter shows that David did not complete the prophecy. Yet, just as 2 Kings 3 shows that defeated Moab was but a small thing (see vs. 18), God would bring further judgment on Moab (see Amos 2.1-3). And ultimately it is Jehovah's Son who would subjugate Moab and all the nations (Psalm 2).



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 12: JEHOVAH & THE NATIONS (1KINGS 17; 2KINGS 5)

Luke records that after His baptism and subsequent temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went to Galilee and taught in the synagogues (Luke 4:14-15). Naturally, Jesus would make His way to Nazareth, but as we know the encounter did not go well. Jesus told those assembled that “no prophet is welcome in his hometown” and then proved His point by offering two examples: “But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke 4:25-27, NASB95)

In our last lesson we focused on God's sovereignty over the nations. His sovereignty was seen in His anointing of foreign kings (2Kings 8.7-15), in His delivering the faithful from their threat (2Kings 6) and in the execution of His judgment (2Kings 3). Jehovah is more than a local or national deity; He is Lord over all. And since He is Lord over all, He also cares for the nations. The two examples given by Jesus give proof to the fact that Jehovah cares for the nations.

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH (1KINGS 17.8-24):

Notes from the text:

- Vs. 9, Zarephath lay on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon. It is important to note that this is the home territory of Jezebel, and thus the home territory of Baal (see 1Kings 16.31-32).
- Vs. 10, “Based on the statements in the prologues of the Ur-Nammu Code and the Code of Hammurabi, it is clear that kings considered it part of their role as “wise rulers” to protect the rights of the poor, the widow and the orphan. Similarly, in the Egyptian Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the plaintiff begins by identifying his judge as “the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow.” If a god is going to demonstrate his role as a king, one clear way of doing so is to show his concern for the vulnerable by caring for the needs of a widow in desperate need.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 14, grain and oil were two major exports of the city of Zarephath, so this shows just how severe the famine was in the land.
- Vs. 16, “There is no indication of a massive supply, simply that the ingredients were



always on hand as they were needed. Each use of the flour and oil would require faith that God would meet daily need (cf. Matt 6:11). Thus both Elijah and the widow learned to put their continued faith and trust in the Provider rather than in the provision." (Expositors Bible Commentary)

- Vs. 18, "Prophets were often considered dangerous and having one around posed considerable risk. The gods could be harsh taskmasters as often as they could be generous benefactors, and the prophets represented them. Additionally, if the prophet were to become angered or offended at any little thing, he might, in an uncontrolled moment, pronounce some sort of curse that would inevitably come true. The woman assumes that her child's death is punishment from some presumed (though unknown) offense that has come to the attention of the deity because of the prophet's presence. She had thus far benefited from Elijah's presence, but now she judges that the cost was too high." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 21, "In Mesopotamian incantation literature the touching of part to part is a means by which demons exercise power over their intended victims—it is the idiom of possession. In this belief, vitality or life force can be transferred from one body to the other by contact of each part. By imitating the procedure believed to be used by demons, the prophet is able, through the power of Yahweh (notice the prayer), to drive the demons out and restore the boy's life." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 22, "Part of the profile of fertility gods was the dying and rising cycle that was related to vegetation and to the seasons. The deity would "die" during the winter months and descend to the netherworld. He would be brought back out of the netherworld and restored to life in the spring to bring fertility back to the land. His power to enable fertility extended beyond crops to animals and people as well. As a god who regularly returned from death, it was believed that these fertility gods also had the power to occasionally restore life to someone who had died... Therefore, by restoring the boy's life, Yahweh is again showing his power in the realm considered to be Baal's central arena." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

Takeaways:

1. The Lord was concerned for someone who was not yet a worshiper of His. Note the widow's address of Elijah in vs. 12, "as the Lord your God lives". Jehovah was Elijah's God, not hers.
2. Jehovah did what Baal could not. Not only did He provide a constant supply of flour and oil (vss. 14-16), but He raised the woman's son from the dead (vs. 22).
3. The widow demonstrated faith in Jehovah. This faith was seen in her willingness to make Elijah's cake first (vs. 13) and every day afterwards as the supply of flour and oil was replenished (vss. 14-16). And even though she struggled at the death of her son, faith was evident in her giving the child to Elijah (vs. 19).
4. The end result was that God was glorified (vs. 24). Elijah was proven to be a man of God, and the word of God was proven to be true!

NAAMAN (2KINGS 5)

Notes from the text:

- Vs. 8, "he was a leper"
 - » "Those studying the language have concluded that the term often translated "leprosy" is more accurately rendered "lesion," or, less technically, "scaly skin." Such

patches could be swelled or weeping, as well as flaking. Similar broad terminology also exists in Akkadian, where the Babylonians likewise considered it an unclean condition and the punishment of the gods... The condition discussed in the text is not presented as contagious. Descriptions would suggest that modern diagnoses would include psoriasis, eczema, favus and seborrheic dermatitis, as well as a number of fungal-type infections." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

- » "An interesting analogy is found in an Old Babylonian omen text that says that 'if the skin of a man exhibits white pusu-areas or is dotted with nuqdu dots, such a man has been rejected by his god and is to be rejected by mankind.' A neo-Assyrian text similarly maintains that 'if a man has the surface of his flesh covered with black and white spots, the disease is the mamitu (curse/tabu).' (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 5, "Ten talents equals thirty thousand shekels, about seven hundred fifty pounds of silver. The six thousand shekels of gold equals about one hundred fifty pounds (one gold shekel equaled fifteen silver shekels). Converted to today's buying power, it would be in the vicinity of three-quarters of a billion dollars." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 6, the Syrian king probably assumes that Elisha works for the king of Israel, because this is how it worked in Syria.
- Vs. 7, the Jordan River was ~40 miles from Samaria.
- Vs. 18, "Rimmon (=Ramman, "thunderer") is believed to be a title of the storm god, Hadad, the head of the Aramean pantheon." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 23, "Considering what Naaman had been prepared to offer, Gehazi's request is extremely modest, yet it is still a considerable sum. A talent of silver is three hundred years of wages (for someone making thirty to thirty-five thousand a year, that would be like getting about ten million dollars), and Naaman doubles it. Gehazi is trying to set himself up for life." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)



Takeaways:

1. God orchestrated the cleansing of Naaman (vss. 1-2).
 - a. I've often used the story of Naaman to show how many different roles were involved in Naaman's cleansing. There was the servant girl who pointed the way, the prophet who gave God's instructions, the servant who encouraged obedience and ultimately Naaman who yielded.
 - b. But it was God who brought about Naaman's cleansing. It was the Lord who gave Naaman victory (vs. 1), thus it was God who brought Naaman into contact with the young girl. Yes, each party still needed to do their part, but the account shows that it was God who desired the cleansing of Naaman.

2. Naaman struggled to believe, but ultimately he had to submit to God's will (vss. 11-14).
3. The result: God was glorified.
 - a. Naaman was now a converted worshiper of Jehovah (vss. 17-19)
 - b. Gehazi's greed was an attempt to take glory away from Jehovah, thus Gehazi was inflicted with the dreaded disease (vss. 20-27).

JESUS' USE OF THESE EXAMPLES (LUKE 4.16-30)

Recall that Jesus read from Isaiah 61.1-2 in the synagogue, a passage where the Lord promised that the gospel would bring freedom and healing. Jesus then proclaimed that "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (vs. 21). It was this remark that brought about the ire of many and Jesus' declaration that He would be rejected by His own people. Where would He go? While Jesus worked primarily in Judea, it's of note that most of His ministry was in Galilee, an area decidedly less "Jewish" than Jerusalem. And ultimately, Jesus' followers would be charged with taking the gospel to all the world (Matthew 28.18-20). Jehovah had already shown that He was concerned for the nations by sending Elijah to the widow of Zarephath and by sending Naaman to Elisha. Now Jehovah had sent His Son to bless the whole world! (John 3.16)



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 13: ELIJAH & JOHN

We titled this class "The Days of Elijah" and have focused on what Jehovah did during the days of His prophets Elijah and Elisha as recorded in 1&2 Kings. However, the days of Elijah were not limited to the time of the divided kingdom, because there was another Elijah to come. As Jesus stated, "*if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.*" (Matthew 11.14). So, as we conclude our study of "The Days of Elijah", we will focus on the role of John.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ELIJAH AND JOHN

The old testament concludes with this prophecy: "*Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*" (Malachi 4:5–6, NASB95) Significantly, Luke's account of Jesus' life begins with the Lord's angel revealing to Zacharias that he and his would wife would have a son who would come "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*" (Luke 1.17). Interestingly, there were some Jews who thought the actual Elijah would return since he didn't die (see 2Kings 2). It may be for this reason that John stated he was not Elijah (see John 1.21). So, let's note some similarities between these two men:

1. There was a similarity in their appearance. Recall that Elijah was described as a "hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins" (2Kings 1.8). Furthermore, we know there were times when God provided for Elijah in the wilderness (1Kings 17.5-6; 19.4-8). Similarly, John lived in the deserts (Luke 1.80) and wore a garment of camel's hair with a leather belt and ate the food that was available in the wilderness, i.e. was provided by God (Matthew 3.4).
2. Both were opposed by rulers of their day. Ahab would refer to Elijah as the "troubler of Israel" (1Kings 18.17) and his enemy (1Kings 21.20), while Jezebel would seek to kill the prophet (1Kings 19.1-2). John was killed by Herod because he spoke against his illicit marriage (Mark 6.17-30).
3. Both urged loyalty to Jehovah. Elijah urged the people to not "hesitate between two opinions" and declare loyalty to Jehovah rather than Baal (1Kings 18.21). John preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3.3).
4. Both had times of doubt or misunderstanding. Elijah asked the Lord to take his life (1Kings 19.4), despairing that he alone was faithful (vs. 10). John, while in prison, sent messengers asking Jesus if He were the "Expected One", likely not understanding why his faithfulness to God had resulted in his present circumstances (Matthew 11.1-3)
5. The announcement that John would come in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1.17) also makes a strong parallel to the Elijah story when we see Elisha request to receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2Kings 2.9). Elisha received his request, enabling him to carry on the Lord's work. John coming in the "spirit and power of Elijah" would insure his ability to carry out the Lord's work as well.

THE MALACHI PROPHESIES

Malachi records two prophecies regarding the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah's coming, Malachi 3.1 and Malachi 4.5-6. Let's consider the second prophecy first, including the preceding verse:

Malachi 4:4–6 (NASB95)

4“Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

5“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

6“He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

- First, there is the call for Israel to remember God's Law that was delivered by Moses on Mount Horeb (vs. 4)
- Next, it is stated that Elijah would come before the day of the Lord (vs. 5). Significantly, Elijah came exactly because Israel was not following the Law, having turned aside to follow after Baal.
- Finally, we are told of Elijah's mission (vs. 6). “we favor the point of view according to which the semantic domain of “turning back,” is not so much the projected social order but the covenant relationship as such. When Elijah comes he will restore the covenant relationship. In this process he will turn about the hearts of the wicked posterity to the hearts of them with whom God has entered into a covenant at Horeb.” (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)
- So, just as Elijah had come to try and bring the people back into covenant with God, so this future Elijah (i.e. John) would come to do the same.

Now, let's note the second prophecy. This one does not name Elijah, but Jesus plainly stated that it was fulfilled in John (see Matthew 11.10).

Malachi 3:1 (NASB95)

1“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.

- In this prophecy the Lord stated that His messenger would “clear the way before Me”, i.e. before God Himself.
- John understood the uniqueness of his work, so he proclaimed that the One coming after him would be mightier than him (Luke 3.15-17).
- Jesus also understood the unique nature of John's work and that it made him greatest of those born among women, even though those who lived to see the Kingdom would surpass him (Matthew 11.9-11).
- So, John may be Elijah (Matthew 11.14), but Jesus was greater because He is the Lord Himself (see Matthew 16.13-16; 17.1-13).

THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

We have emphasized throughout that our study of Elijah and Elisha was in fact a study of the Lord's work. Well, that is certainly true of John. He was the forerunner of the Lord, and the One who came after Him would both save and judge His people (Luke 3:16-17). And just as the Lord worked through Elijah and Elisha to reach individuals from among the nations, John prepared the way for the One who would be able to save those from every nation (cf. Luke 3:8-9).