

# 1 Kings

# INTRODUCTION

The books of 1 and 2 Kings take up recording the historical events of God's people where the books of 1 and 2 Samuel leave off. However, Kings is more than just a compilation of the politically important or socially significant happenings in Israel and Judah. In fact, it is not as detailed a history as might be expected (four hundred years in only forty-seven chapters). Instead, 1 and 2 Kings is a selective history, one with a theological purpose. Therefore, the author selects and emphasizes the people and events that are morally and religiously significant. First and 2 Kings present God as the Lord of history. From history, these books establish God's providential working in and through the lives of His people for His redemptive purpose. They demonstrate the necessity of obedience to God's covenant and the painful consequence of disobedience. Therefore, the books of 1 and 2 Kings are not to be viewed as mere history, but as theology and lessons from history.

The united work of 1 and 2 Kings naturally divides into three main sections. The "Unified Kingdom" under Solomon in 1 Kings 1-11; the "Divided Kingdom" in 1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17; and finally, 2 Kings 18-25 focuses on the surviving "Kingdom of Judah."

The first half of 1 Kings records the glory of Solomon's reign, his wealth, wisdom, and the monumental accomplishment of the building of the temple. However, his disobedience in marrying foreign wives led him into idolatry; and the stage was set for the division of the kingdom. The king with a divided heart would leave behind a divided kingdom. On his death, those in the northern part of the empire rebelled and established their own nation, known as Israel. In the south, those who remained faithful to the house of David and Solomon formed the nation known as Judah.

In the second half of 1 Kings, which describes the divided kingdom, the narrative is difficult to follow. The author switches back and forth between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, tracing their histories simultaneously. There were nineteen regents (governors, rulers) in Israel, all of them bad. In Judah, there were twenty rulers, only eight of them good. First Kings records the first nine rulers in Israel and the first four kings in Judah. Some of these thirteen regents are only mentioned in a few verses, while whole chapters are devoted to others. Major attention is directed to those who either serve as a model of uprightness, or to those who illustrate why these nations eventually collapsed. When 1 Kings closes, Jehoshaphat is the king in Judah, and Ahaziah on the throne in Israel.

The failure of the prophets, priests, and kings of God's people points to the necessity of the advent of Christ. Christ Himself would be the ideal combination of these three offices. As a Prophet, Christ's word far surpasses that of the great prophet Elijah (Matt. 17:1-5). Many of the miracles of Jesus were reminiscent of the wonders God did through Elijah and Elisha in Kings. In addition, Christ is a Priest superior to any of those recorded in Kings (Heb. 7:22-27). First Kings vividly illustrates the need for Christ as our reigning King. When asked if He were King of the Jews, Jesus affirmed that He was (Matt. 27:11). However, Christ is a King "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42). The name "Solomon" means "peace"; Christ is the "Prince of Peace," and there will be no end to His peace (Isa. 9:6). Solomon was noted for his wisdom, but Christ is the "wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:25, 29). Solomon's reign was temporary, but Christ will reign on the throne of David forever (1 Chr. 17:14; Is. 9:6), for He is "King Of Kings And Lord Of Lords" (Rev. 19:16).

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to 1 Kings, Larry D. Powers)

## 1 Kings 1:1-53

The public life of David had been a stormy one throughout, nor was he permitted to end his career in tranquility—such is generally the lot of those in high station, who are ignorantly envied by so many. Even in his declining days, when the infirmities of old age were upon David, serious trouble broke out in his kingdom, so that both the public peace was jeopardized and his own family circle again threatened by the assassin. Another of his own sons now set himself not only against the will of his father, but also against the declared purpose of God; in which he was abetted by those who had long held positions of honor under the king. No doubt we should look deeper and see here a setting forth of the conflict which obtains in a higher realm: the enmity of the Serpent against the woman's Seed and his opposition to the will of God concerning His kingdom. But it is with that which refers more immediately to David we shall concern ourselves.

The record of what we have referred to above is found in 1 Kings 1. That chapter opens by presenting to us the once virile and active king now going the way of all the earth: his natural spirits dried up, no longer able to attend to public affairs. The events chronicled therein occurred very near the close of David's eventful career. Though not yet quite seventy he is described as "old and well stricken in years." Though blest with a vigorous constitution, the king was thoroughly worn out: among the contributing causes, we may mention the strenuous life he had lived and the heavy domestic griefs which had fallen upon him. That he was still dearly beloved by his followers is evident from their kindly if ill-advised efforts for his comfort (vv. 1-3). David's falling in with their plan shows him taking the line of least resistance, apparently out of deference to the wishes of his attendants. It was a device which has been resorted to in various climes (climates) and ages, yet surely it was one which did not become a child of God.

Old age as well as youth has its own particular snares, for if the danger of the latter is to disdain the advice of seniors and be too self-willed, the infirmities of the former place them more in the power of their juniors and they are apt to yield to arrangements which their consciences condemn. It is not easy to deny the wishes of those who are tending us, and it seems ungrateful to refuse well-meant efforts to make our closing days more comfortable. But while on the one hand the aged need to guard against irritability and a domineering spirit, yet on the other they must not be a willing party to that which they know is wrong. Legitimate means of restoring health and for prolonging our days should be employed, but unlawful measures and anything having the appearance of evil or which may become an occasion of temptation to us, should be steadfastly refused, no matter by whom it be proposed.

The Lord's *displeasure* against David's weakness in consenting to the carnal counsel of his friends, is plainly marked in the immediate sequel. Serious trouble now arose from yet another of his sons. It is true that this was the fruit of his earlier laxity in ruling his children, for he was much too easy-going with them: yet *the time* when this impious insubordination occurred leaves us in no doubt that it is to be regarded as a divine chastening of David for being a party to such a questionable procedure as that to which we have briefly alluded above. "Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (1 Kings 1:5). Nothing is more conspicuous throughout the whole history of David than that, whenever a believer sows to the flesh, he will most certainly of the flesh reap corruption; and another solemn example of this is here before us.

David was now stricken in years, and the time for one to succeed him to the throne had well nigh arrived. Yet it was for Jehovah alone to say who that one should be. But Adonijah, the oldest living son, determined to be that successor. Nor is this to be wondered at, for his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, "Why hast thou done so?" (v. 6). David had permitted him to have his own way. He never crossed his will, never inquired the motive of his actions, nor at any time rebuked him for his folly. In allowing his son to be guided by his own unbridled will, David sadly failed to exercise his parental authority and to fulfill his parental responsibility; and bitterly did he now pay for his folly, as many since have also been made to do.

That which immediately follows verse 6 is recorded for our learning, and a most solemn warning does it point for our own day, when so many fond parents are allowing their children to grow up with little or no restraint placed upon them. They are only preparing a rod for their own backs. God Himself has forbidden parents to refrain from chastening their children when they need it: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die" (Prov. 23:13). And again, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov. 13:24). And yet again, "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18). Because of his parental neglect David himself was in large measure responsible for the lawlessness of his son. Lax and indulgent parents must expect willful and wayward children, and if they despise the infirmities of their sires and are impatient to get possession of their estates, that will be all which they deserve at their hands.

David's unruly son now determined to exalt himself, even though he certainly knew that Solomon had been appointed by God to succeed David in the kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Kings 2:15-18). "Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (v. 5). In this magnifying of his state, he followed the evil example of his rebellious brother Absalom (2 Sam. 15:1)—a solemn warning this for older brothers to set their younger ones a good example. Adonijah dared to usurp the throne of Israel: he made a feast, gathered the people about him, and incited them to proclaim him as king (vv. 7-9, 25). In this too he was again following the example of Absalom (2 Sam. 15:10), confident that where his brother had failed, he would now succeed. But like Absalom before him, Adonijah reckoned without God: "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth forever" (Ps. 33:10, 11).

Nevertheless, for a time it looked as though the daring revolt of Adonijah would be successful, for both Joab the commander of the army and Abiathar the priest, threw in their lot with him (v. 7). Thus does God often allow the wicked to prosper for awhile, yet their triumphing is but short. Joab, as we have seen in other connections, was a thoroughly unprincipled and ungodly man, and no doubt the impious Adonijah was more congenial to his disposition than Solomon would be. Moreover if this son of Haggith obtained the kingdom, then his own position would be secure, and he would not be displaced by a successor to Amasa (2 Sam. 19:13). So too Abiathar the high priest seems to have been less regarded by David than Zadok was, and probably he feared that Solomon would set his family aside for the line of Eleazar to which Zadok belonged (1 Kings 1:25).

Characters like Joab and Abiathar are ever actuated by selfish motives, though individuals like Adonijah often flatter themselves that the service of such is rendered out of love or esteem for their persons, when in reality very different considerations move them. Disinterested loyalty is a rare thing, and where found it cannot be valued too highly. Those in eminent positions, whether in church or state, are surrounded by mercenary sycophants (self-seeking flatterers), who are ever eager to turn to their own advantage everything which transpires. It matters nothing to Joab and Abiathar that their royal master was a pious and faithful one, who had steadily sought the good of the kingdom, or that Adonijah was a grasping and lawless semi-heathen; they were ready to forsake the one and espouse the other. So it is still: that is why those in high places are afraid to trust the ones nearest to them in office.

"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21). No planning on man's part can thwart the purpose of the Most High. Saul had proved that; so too had Absalom; so now shall Adonijah. Yet the Lord is pleased to use human instruments in bringing His counsel to pass. He always has His man ready to intervene at the critical moment. In this instance it was Nathan the prophet: "Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth it not?" (v. 11). Nathan had been faithful in rebuking David for his sin in former days (2 Sam. 11:7-12), he was faithful now in recalling to him the promise he had made concerning Solomon. He interviewed Bathsheba and persuaded her to go unto David and remind him of his oath (vv. 11-13), and arranged that while she was speaking to the king, he also would come into his presence and confirm her testimony (v. 14).

It is blessed, both from the divine and human side, to see how readily and how graciously Bathsheba responded to Nathan's suggestion. From the divine side, we may behold how that when God works He works at both ends of the line: if the prophet gave counsel under divine prompting, the queen was willing in the day of God's power, as David also yielded thereto—each acted under divine impulse, yet each acted quite freely. From the human side, we may note that Bathsheba made no demur to Nathan's counsel but readily acquiesced. Though David was her husband she "bowed and did obeisance to the king" and addressed him as "my lord" (vv. 16, 17), thereby evidencing that she was a true daughter of Abraham. First she reminded him of his solemn oath that Solomon should reign after him (v. 17). Then she acquainted him with the revolt of Adonijah (v. 18). Next she assured the king that the nation awaited an authoritative word from him about the accession; and ended by warning him that if he failed in his duty she and Solomon would be in grave danger of their lives.

"And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet came in" (v. 22). It was something more than a politic move on Nathan's part to appear before the king at the psychological moment and second what Bathsheba had just said. It was an act of obedience to the Word of God, for the divine law required that matters of solemn moment must be confirmed by one or more witnesses. "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deut. 19:15). The same principle was insisted upon by Christ on more than one occasion, and therefore it is binding on us today. Much needless trouble had been avoided in the church (Matthew 18:16), many a false accusation had been exposed (John 8:13, 17), many a breach had been healed (2 Cor. 13:1), and many an innocent servant of God had been cleared (1 Tim. 5:19) if only this principle had been duly heeded.

According to his promise to Bathsheba Nathan entered the king's presence and bore out what she had just told him. The prophet showed how urgent the situation was. First, he declared that the supporters of the revolter were so confident of success that they were even now saying "God save king Adonijah" (v. 25). Second, he pointed out the ominous fact that neither himself nor Zadok the priest, Benaiah or Solomon had been invited to the feast (v. 26), which made evident his lawless designs: neither the will of God nor the desire of his father were going to be consulted. Third, he endeavored to get the aged David to take definite action before it was too late. He asks the king point blank if this thing was being done with his approval (v. 27), to make him realize the better what blatant insolence Adonijah and his party were guilty of in thus acting without authority from the crown. Thus did he make clear to David his public duty.

It was now that the real character of David asserted itself. Weak he was in the ruling of his own household, but ever firm and fearless where the interests of God's kingdom were concerned. Nothing could induce him to resist the revealed will of the Lord for Israel. First, he now acknowledged again the faithfulness of God unto himself: "And the king sware, and said, As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress" (v. 29). The Lord is the Deliverer of all who put their trust in Him, and repeatedly had He delivered David out of the hands of his enemies. Second, God's faithfulness to David now inspired him to be faithful to his covenant promise concerning Solomon: "Even as I sware unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead;

even so will I certainly do this day" (v. 30). Most blessed is this: whatever danger his own person might be threatened with, he hesitated not.

In what immediately follows we are informed of the decisive measures taken by David to overthrow the plot of Adonijah. "Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king. The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet and say, God save king Solomon. Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah" (vv. 32-35). Orders were given for the proclaiming of Solomon: he was to be set upon the royal mule, formally anointed, and duly proclaimed king. This important transaction was entrusted to men of God who had proved themselves in His service. Solomon would thus have the necessary authority for conducting state affairs until David's decease, after which there would be no uncertainty in the public mind as to his rightful successor.

"And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: the Lord God of my lord the king say so too. As the Lord hath been with my lord the king, even so be He with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David" (vv. 36, 37). The measures proposed by the king met with the hearty approval of his advisers. Speaking in the name of the others, Benaiah expressed their complete satisfaction in the royal nomination: his "Amen" shows the original meaning and emphasis of this term—it was faith's affirmation, assured that God would make good His promise. Benaiah's language was that of fervent piety, for he realized that the plans of his master, no matter how wise and good, could not be carried to a successful conclusion without the blessing of divine providence—alas that this is so largely lost sight of today. He added the earnest prayer that God would bless Solomon's reign even more than He had his father's.

The orders which David had given were promptly executed. Solomon was brought in state to the place appointed and was duly anointed. This gave great joy and satisfaction to the people. "And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them" (v. 40): thereby they evidenced their cheerful acceptance of him as David's successor. In like manner, all who belong to the true Israel of God gladly own the lordship of His Son. The sequel was indeed striking. No sooner was Solomon acclaimed by the loyal subjects of David, than news thereof was borne to Adonijah and his fellow conspirators (vv. 41, 42). Instead of ending in joy, the feast of the rebel terminated in consternation: "And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way. And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar" (vv. 49, 50). Thus did the Lord graciously show Himself strong on David's behalf to the end of his course.

In closing we would call attention to a most blessed typical picture, in which both David and Solomon are needed to give it completeness—compare the joint-types supplied by Joseph and Benjamin, Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha. First, David had been successful as "a man of war" (1 Chron. 28:3), for by him the Lord so overcame the enemies of Israel as to "put them under the soles of his feet" (1 Kings 5:3): in like manner the Lord Jesus by His death and resurrection was victorious over all His foes (Col. 2:14, 15). Second, Solomon had been chosen and ordained to the throne before he was born (1 Chron. 22:9): so too Christ was the Elect of God "from all eternity" (Isa. 42:1). Third, Solomon rode on a mule, not as a warrior, but in lowly guise: so did Christ (Matthew 21:1-9). Fourth, he was anointed with the sacred oil—type of the Spirit: so Christ received the Spirit in His fulness at His ascension (Acts 2:23; Rev. 3:1). Finally, rest and quietness was granted unto Israel throughout Solomon's reign (1 Chron. 22:19): so Christ is now reigning as "the Prince of peace" over His people.

(The Life of David, A. W. Pink)

### **Why were two people needed to bring the news to David concerning Adonijah?**

Deut. 19:15    1 Tim. 5:19

### **How do the verses in Psalms 127:1-2 apply to what has happened in 1 Kings 1:1-53.**

### **1 Kings 2:1-12**

The sand in David's hourglass was running low; the time appointed for his departure from this world had almost arrived; yet it is beautiful to behold him using his remaining strength in the service of God, rather than rusting out amid the shadows. The sun of his life had often been temporarily overcast, but it set in golden splendor, illustrating that word, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (Eccl. 7:8). The revolt of Adonijah was the last dark cloud to pass across his horizon, and it was quickly dissolved, to give place to blue skies of peace and joy. The final scenes are painted in roseate colors and the exit of our patriarch from this world was one which well fitted the man after God's own heart. Blessed is it to see him using his fast-failing energies in setting in order the affairs of the kingdom and to mark how the glory of the Lord and the good of his people was that which now wholly absorbed him.

The Holy Spirit has dwelt at quite some length upon the closing acts of David's reign, supplementing the briefer account given in 1 Kings by furnishing much fuller details in 1 Chronicles. It is to these supplementary accounts we now turn. In them we, first, behold him completing the extensive preparations he had made for the building of the temple. Second, his giving solemn charge unto Solomon concerning the erection of the Lord's house, concerning his own personal conduct, and concerning the removal of his enemies. Third, his charge to the princes to stand by and assist his son. Fourth, his ordering of the priesthood in their courses. Fifth, his charge to the officers of the nation. Sixth, his entrusting to Solomon the pattern or plan of the temple which he had received from God. Seventh, his final charge to the whole congregation. Most carefully did David prepare for the end of his reign and for the welfare of his successor.

"And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical of fame and of glory, throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death" (1 Chron. 22:5). The dearest desire of his heart had been to erect a permanent house for the worship of God, and a tremendous amount of materials had he already acquired and consecrated to that end. But his wish was not granted: another was to have that peculiar honor; yet he did not, like so many peevish persons when their wills are crossed, mope and fret, and then lose all interest in the Lord's service; but readily acquiesced in God's will and continued his preparation. Yea, so far from advancing age and increasing infirmities deterring him, they quickened him to increased diligence and effort.

The extent and value of the materials which David had gathered for the temple may be seen by: "Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance; timber also and stone have I prepared" (1 Chron. 22:14). These were all ready at hand for his successor, who made good use of the same. What encouragement is there here for us: much good may appear after our death, which we were not permitted to witness during our life. Often we grieve because we see so little fruit for our labor, yet if we are diligent in preparing materials, others after us may build therewith. Then let us sow beside all waters, and confidently leave the outcome with God. Those who are mature and experienced should consider the younger ones who are to follow, and furnish all the help they can to make the work of God as easy as possible for them.

We turn next to the charges which David gave to his son. The first concerned his building of the temple, for this lay most of all upon his heart. "Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the Lord God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build a house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight" (1 Chron. 22:6-8). Here we see how jealous God was of His types (foreshadows)—as was also evidenced by His displeasure against Moses for striking the rock (the second occasion) instead of speaking to it; and by His smiting Gehazi with leprosy for seeking a reward from the healed Naaman. The erection of the temple was a figure of Christ building His Church, and this He does not by destroying men's lives, but by saving them.

Continuing the "word" which David had received from the Lord, he adds, "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon (Peaceable), and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name; and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever. Now, my son, the Lord be with thee, and prosper thou, and build the house of the Lord thy God, as He hath said of thee" (1 Chron. 22:9-11). In what follows David enjoined his son (v. 13) to keep God's commands and to take heed to his duty in everything. He must not think that by building the temple he would secure a dispensation to indulge the lusts of the flesh. Nay, let him know that though king of Israel, he was himself a subject of the God of Israel, and would be prospered by Him in proportion as he made the divine law his rule (cf. Josh. 1:8).

A little later he addressed him thus: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build a house for the sanctuary: be strong and do it" (1 Chron. 28:9, 10). How concerned David was that his son should be pious. Faithfully did he set before him the inevitable alternative: blessing if he served the Lord, woe if he turned away from Him. Here was a case where divine foreordination had made irrevocably certain the end, and yet where human responsibility was insisted upon. The perpetuity of God's kingdom to David's posterity was absolutely assured in Christ, yet the entail of the temporal kingdom was made contingent on the conduct of David's descendants: if they were self-willed and remained disobedient, the entail would be cut off.

The same note of contingency is struck again unmistakably in "*If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said He) a man on the throne of Israel*" (1 Kings 2:4). Alas, we know from the sequel what happened: God punished the idolatry of Solomon by the defection of the ten tribes from his son, till ultimately the family of David was deprived of all royal authority. It has been thus all through: man has utterly failed in whatever trust God has committed to him: sentence of death was written upon the prophetic, the priestly, and the kingly office in Israel. Was then the divine purpose thwarted? No indeed; that could not be: the counsels of God are made good in the Second Man and not in the first. It is in and by and through *Christ* the divine decrees are secured. And as it is in the Second Man and not in the first, so it is in a *heavenly* realm and not in the earthly that the Old

Testament promises find their fulfillment. Christ according to the flesh, was made of the seed of David, and in Him the kingdom of God is *spiritually* realized.

"And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord" (1 Chron. 28:20). It is noteworthy that that to which David principally exhorted his son was firmness and boldness. Courage is one of the graces most needed by the servants of God, for the devil as a roaring lion will ever seek to strike terror into their hearts. This was the charge given to Joshua when called to succeed Moses: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law" (Josh. 1:7). To His servant the prophet the Lord said, "Fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house" (Ezek. 3:9): the frowns of those who hate the Truth are no more to be regarded than the flattery of those who would quench the Spirit by puffing us up with a sense of our own importance. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28) said Christ to the apostles—gifts are of no avail if we lack courage to use them.

The charge which David gave to Solomon concerning his old enemies is recorded in 1 Kings 2. "Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the host of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace and, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei . . . which cursed me with a grievous curse . . . now therefore hold him not guiltless . . ." etc. (vv. 5-9). These orders are not to be regarded as issuing from a spirit of private revenge, but rather with a regard for the glory of God and the good of Israel. Joab had long deserved to die for his cold-blooded murders, and the part he had recently played in aiding the revolt of Adonijah. While such men as he and Shimei lived they would be a continual *menace* to Solomon and the peacefulness of his reign.

The charge David made to the princes is found in 1 Chronicles 22: "David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, Is not the Lord your God with you? and hath He not given you rest on every side? for He hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the Lord, and before His people. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary" (vv. 17-19). Once more we see how deeply concerned David was that the honor of Jehovah should be promoted by the erection of a suitable dwelling-place for His holy ark, and therefore did he command the princes to give whatever aid they could to his son in this undertaking. Monarchs can only forward the work of God in their dominions as they are supported by those nearest to them in high office. David urged upon them their obligations by insisting that gratitude to God for His abundant mercies called for generosity and effort on their part. He bids them be zealous by fixing their eyes on God's glory and making His favor their happiness. When the Lord truly possesses the heart neither sacrifice nor service will be begrudged.

From 1 Chronicles 23 and the chapters which follow we learn of the considerable trouble David went to in fixing the arrangements for the temple services and putting in order the offices of it, in which he prepared for the house of God as truly as when he laid up silver and gold for it. It is noticeable that the tribe of Levi had multiplied almost fourfold (23:3, and cf. Num. 4:46-48), which was a much greater increase than in any other tribe. It was for the honor of Jehovah that so great a number of servants should attend His house—an adumbration of the countless millions of angels which wait upon the heavenly throne. A detailed account is supplied of the distribution of the priests and Levites into their respective classes and of their duties, such particularization showing us that God is a God of order, especially in matters pertaining to His worship. The distribution of the officers was made by lot (24:5, etc.) to show that all was governed by the divine will (Prov. 16:33). The priesthood was divided into twenty-four courses (24:18), a figure perhaps of the "twenty-four elders" of Revelation 4:4.

"Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof . . . And the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, . . . All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern" (1 Chron. 28:11, 12, 19). David had received full instructions from God concerning the design of the temple and how everything was to be ordered in it: nothing was left to chance or the caprice of man, nor even to the wisdom of Solomon; all was divinely prescribed. Moses had received a similar pattern for the building of the tabernacle (Ex. 25:9) both of them being a figure of Christ and heavenly things. But the worship of God in this Christian era is in marked contrast from that which obtained under the Mosaic economy: in keeping with the much greater liberty which obtains under the New Covenant, precise rules and detailed regulations for the external worship of God in every circumstance are nowhere to be found in either the Acts or the Epistles.

The charge which David gave to the congregation was the longest of any. First, he warned them that Solomon was of tender years—less than twenty—and therefore very young to assume such heavy responsibilities (1 Chron. 29:1). Second, he reminded them how he had himself "prepared with all his might for the house of his God" (v. 2), having "set his affection" thereon, and urged his hearers to emulate his example by giving of their substance unto the Lord (v. 5). Both the leaders (vv. 5-8) and the people (v. 9) responded "willingly" and liberally, so that David "rejoiced with great joy." Then he magnified the Lord in these notable terms, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; *Thine* is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou

art exalted as Head above all. Both riches and honor come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might" (1 Chron. 29:11-12).

The *deep humility* of the man was again evidenced when David added, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thine holy name cometh of *Thine hand*, and is all Thine own" (vv. 14-16). Beautiful is it to hear the king in his last words giving honor to whom honor is due. "And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord, and the king. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the Lord . . . And they did eat and drink before the Lord on that day with great gladness (vv. 20-22). What a grand finale was this to the reign of David: the king surrounded by his subjects engaged in joyfully worshipping the King of kings!

"Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die" (1 Kings 2:1): not that extreme old age necessitated his demise, but because his appointed time had arrived. The length of our sojourn on this earth is not determined by the care we take of our health (though human responsibility requires that we abstain from all intemperance and recklessness), nor upon the skill of our physicians (though all lawful means should be employed), but upon the sovereign decree of God. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days . . . His days are *determined*, the number of his months are with Thee, Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:1, 5). No, when the divinely-ordained limit is reached, all the doctors in the world cannot prolong our life a single moment. Thus we are told of Jacob, "The time drew nigh that Israel *must* die" (Gen. 47:29)—"must" because God had decreed it. So it was with David: he had fulfilled God's purpose concerning him, his course was finished, and he could now enter into his eternal rest.

"And he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth" (1 Kings 2:1). He realized that his end was near, yet he was not diffident to own it nor afraid to speak of dying. He calmly referred to his decease as a "way": it was not only an exit from this world, but an entrance into another and better one. He speaks of his death as "the way of all the earth": from the earth its dwellers are taken, and to it they return (Gen. 3:19). Even the heirs of heaven (except those alive at Christ's return: 1 Cor. 15:51) must pass through the valley of the shadow of death, yet they need fear no evil. In like manner Paul spoke of his "departure" (2 Tim. 4:6), using a nautical term which refers to a ship being loosed from its moorings: so at death the soul is released from the cables which bound it to the shores of time, and it glides forth into eternity.

David made all the preparations for his departure with unruffled composure because he knew that death did not end all. He knew that as soon as he drew his last breath. The angels of God (Luke 16:22) would convey him into the abode of the redeemed. He knew the moment his soul was absent from the body, he would be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:19). He knew that in the grave his flesh should rest "in hope" (Ps. 16:9), and that in the morning of the resurrection he should come forth fully conformed to the image of his Savior (Ps. 17:15). And "he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead" (1 Chron. 29:28). His epitaph was inscribed by the Holy Spirit: "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep . . ." (Acts 13:36). May we too be enabled to serve our generation as faithfully as David did his.

(The Life of David, A. W. Pink)

David is declining and is not reluctant to admit "I am about to go the way of all the earth" (1 Kings 2:2). **Is their any anxiety in David as he enters this new period of his life? Why?**

1 Kings 2:1-4 Ps. 23:4

### **1 Kings 2:13-46**

Solomon's birth and its attendant circumstances were strongly suggestive of the gracious character and purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ, our coming King. Solomon's birth was the most emphatic expression of God's mercy to David. He was born to Bathsheba after David's monstrous crime. The fact that God should choose the fruit of that union, after it became legitimate, to sit on Israel's throne at the most glorious crisis of her history, was a most touching seal of the forgiveness which He had extended to His erring child, the mercy of which Jesus Christ's mission is the most impressive expression in all the history of the world. Solomon never could forget that his very existence and destiny were all associated with the grace of Jehovah. This had already been emphatically expressed in the name given to Solomon when he was born. The Lord called him Jedidiah, which means "the beloved," and we are told that the Lord loved him. Beautiful type (foreshadow) of Him who is the Son of His love and who comes to represent the mercy of God and stand for sinful men.

Again, Solomon was not the firstborn, but the secondborn of this union. The first had to die under the ban and doom of sin, but the secondborn lived as the child of grace. This is the very principle of the regenerate life.



The first, natural, passes away. The second is the divine and eternal. The first man Adam, sinned; the second Adam lives. The first natural generation perishes; the second birth, regeneration, brings us life and salvation. Solomon represented this, and thus the very germ and principle of the gospel is embodied and impersonated in his life.

Solomon's name means "peace," and he was the fitting type of the Prince of Peace. David's reign was associated with war and carnage and therefore he was not permitted to build the temple. Solomon was a man of peace and the chief glories of his administration were the triumph of peace, prosperity and progress. David, therefore, could not represent the millennial stage of Christ's kingdom, but rather the stage of conflicts that led up to it. Solomon stands for the age of glory when He shall have put down all authority and opposition, and He shall reign over a realm of perfect love and peace. That age is surely coming. Battle flags will yet be furled, the groans of the wounded and dying will cease, earth's cemeteries shall be transformed into paradises and the curse of ages shall be turned into eternal blessing: not through human culture, not through the development of man's theories and the improvement of man's nature, but by the personal advent of the Prince of Peace of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end.

The circumstances attending Solomon's coronation and the bitter hostility manifested toward him by his enemies and rivals was a striking foreshadowing of the opposition of men to the advent and reign of Christ. When He comes to reign He is not going to be accorded a public reception by the kings and nations and parliaments of earth. The second Psalm has given us a picture of Solomon's accession and Christ's coming. It was written, no doubt, with reference to both, but the temporal allusion soon passes into the higher fulfillment of the distant future. The heathen rage. The people imagine vanity. The kings of the earth are concerted against the Lord and His Christ. The license of man is grinding its teeth against the control of His authority; the proud, willful human heart is crying out, "Let us break their chains, ... and throw off their fetters" (2:3). But "the One enthroned in heaven laughs" (2:4); and by His sure decree and strong right arm "[has] installed [his] King on Zion, [his] holy hill" (2:6), and "will dash ... to pieces like pottery" (2:9) the nations that oppose Him, summoning them to "be wise" (2:10), and "rejoice with trembling" (2:11), and to "kiss the Son" in lowly submission before "his wrath . . . flare up in a moment" (2:12). This is the picture that we can see already developed out of the vortex of political confusion and contemporary history.

The nations are gradually and steadily withdrawing from the control of the Lord Jesus Christ. The concert of the powers which has begun is not to maintain His cause but to protect their little ambitions, aggrandizements and selfish interests; already within a year the concert of Europe has condoned enough unspeakable wickedness against the very children of God and the martyrs of Jesus to bring down upon them God's eternal curse. The end is not going to be a peaceful Christian confederation of the world, but it is going to be Armageddon, the great day of conflict of earth's kings against the Lamb of God and the saints of Jesus. All this was foreshadowed by Solomon's accession. Adonijah, his own brother, reared the standard of rebellion. Joab and Abiathar took his part and multitudes of the people were ready to join them, when by David's strong determination the opposition was suppressed and Solomon was set upon his throne. So it will be at the end: Adonijah representing the political powers, Joab representing the leaders and military forces, and Abiathar representing the corrupt Church. These are the combined forces that are to resist the coming of Christ and to be broken in pieces by the mighty hand of God, even as Daniel's stone cut out of the mountains smashed and scattered the image of earthly sovereignties and became the kingdom that filled the whole earth.

The judgments which accompanied the inauguration of Solomon's reign were very striking and suggestive types of the events that are to accompany the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many instances of men that had lived through the whole reign of David and their darkly dyed crimes had passed with impunity, but their retribution came with the accession of Solomon. One of these was Joab, who had often vexed the heart of David, whose judgment was reserved until the accession of his son. But even Joab was not hastily punished by Solomon but was allowed to show his true character at the end, by joining the standard of Adonijah in open rebellion and thus bringing upon himself at last the deserved doom that David had so often foretold.

Another was Adonijah, who was pardoned for his first act of rebellion, but he was likewise to show a little later his true character by a more subtle conspiracy against the kingdom through Abishag the Shunamite, and this brought upon him also the fate that he had already merited.

Similar was the sentence of Abiathar, who was set aside from the high ecclesiastical place that he had falsely filled, and Zadok appointed in his stead.

The most striking of all these judgments was the death of Shimei, the miserable old churl who had openly cursed David in the hour of his tribulation and who had been magnanimously spared by the king and even granted a respite by Solomon at the beginning of his reign with a definite parole and understanding that if he should break it he should forfeit his life. Shimei was true to his parole for a short time, but he also presumed to despise his pledge of honor and brought upon his own head the judgment that had been pronounced. Thus all these men passed away under the just and terrible retribution which in every case was brought upon their guilty heads by some rash act of their own.

So it will be when the greater King shall come. Then how many secrets will be disclosed! How many lives will be made manifest! How many that have long tried the patience and longsuffering of God will be brought to strict account! How many, by some such test of character, will show that they were never really true and will stand revealed and confessed among His enemies and receive His condemnation and His judgment. "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5), for the fire shall try every man's work (3:13).

Solomon's reign was a type of Christ's millennial glory. His dominion was the most extensive and his throne the most magnificent the world had seen. All nations, it might truly be said, acknowledged his supremacy and came to pay court at his footstool. His riches were so immense that all the vessels of his court and palace were of gold, and silver was scarcely counted of value in the streets of Jerusalem. He maintained a splendid court and table, a thousand wives, innumerable attendants and a vast army wholly occupied in providing for his household. His throne was of ivory and gold and his palace of cedar and marble took 13 years in building and was a gem of magnificence and beauty. Thirty oxen and 100 sheep were daily slaughtered to supply his own royal table. Forty thousand horses formed his stable. Vast aqueducts were built from the mountains to convey water to his pleasure grounds, and paradises and parks of incomparable beauty were constructed on his vast estates. A splendid palace was reared on the slopes of Lebanon, and as he traveled hither and thither he rode in a chariot of ivory, robed in spotless white, with splendid equipage and state, and great pillars of smoking incense preceded and followed his train. As they saw him approach along the valleys of Samaria, the watchmen on the towers of Lebanon cried, "Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke?" (Song of Songs 3:6). Vast forests were cut down and transported from Lebanon to the Persian Gulf and immense navies were built at Ezion Geber at the head of the Indian Ocean. And after a three years' voyage the ships of commerce returned from India laden with gold, silver, wood, peacocks, apes, rarest incense and spices, and all the treasures of the tropics, and the people of Jerusalem saw the caravans day by day entering their gates and bringing their vast treasures to enrich the king and his subjects.

In the early days of his reign, the people shared in this splendid wealth and rejoiced in the sunshine of an extraordinary prosperity, dwelling, as we are told, under their vine and their fig tree in gladness of heart and cloudless prosperity. It was the golden age of Israel and the picture of the summer time of peace and benignity and blessedness which some day will dawn upon this distracted world.

Solomon's reign was signaled by the building of the temple. Christ's coming will be marked by the gathering of the Church, the completing of the Bride and the glorious consummation of the new Jerusalem—that edifice of living stones which Christ has been building through the ages and which some day will stand forth amid the admiring gaze of wondering worlds in all the ineffable glory of the vision of the Apocalypse, with the blended light of the jasper and the gold, the sapphire and the emerald, the amethyst and the pearl, the ruby and the diamond, while the glory of God shall flash from His face and the likeness of the Lamb shall be reflected in His glorified and beloved Bride.

Solomon's reign was marked by the preeminence it gave to the Jewish nation. Israel was the queen of the earthly kingdoms and her supremacy was unchallenged. So it will be when He comes again. He shall restore the splendor of David's throne and the world shall acknowledge Israel as the chosen race. For this He is preparing her scattered sons today. For this He is giving them the language of the nations, the commercial ascendancy in the markets of the world, and even the literary control of journalism and the politics of nations. The time is coming soon when David shall sit upon His throne, and Israel shall sing once more in the heights of Zion. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure' " (Psalm 122:6).

The reign of Solomon was marked by a very wonderful influence among the Gentile nations. For once Israel outreached her ancient limits and stretched out her hands to all the people around. Her ships went to Tarshish and to India; the mighty Phoenician people in the north were her allies and her friends; Egypt, Assyria, Damascus, Hamar and Hiram of Tyre were in friendly alliance, and from the distant south the Queen of Sheba came, representing the myriad multitudes of the outlying world, to pay tribute at his feet. So it will be when Jesus comes again. Then shall the myriad peoples of earth become the subjects of His kingdom and come to pay their tribute at the footstool of His throne. This is not our expectation in this age. Our business is to bring Him to them through the message of the gospel. His business will be to bring them to Him in the conversion of the world. Today we are gathering for Him a little sample from all earth's tribes and nations, a kind of firstfruits of His kingdom; then He Himself shall claim the homage of all their millions and He shall reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

One of the most beautiful circumstances of Solomon's reign was his relation to one loving heart, to whom he seems to have given his supreme affection and who was singled out as the subject of an exquisite romance and the sweetest poem of affection that human language ever composed. It was the beautiful Shunamite of whom he wrote the song of love, the exquisite book of Canticles (Song of Solomon), and who seems to stand as the very type of the Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one for whom He has prepared His kingdom and with whom He is about to share His throne. We cannot enlarge upon this, but we know that Christ is gathering out a Bride for His name, and sweetly calling the hearts that are willing to hearken and obey, to understand His high calling and to know His love and to prepare for His coming. "Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear," He cries; "forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord" (Psalm 45:10-11).

Oh, beloved, let us not miss this lesson. Has He offered us this high calling? Has He given us the secret of His heart, the invitation to the marriage of the Lamb? Let us not miss His calling. Let us not miss the slightest whisper of His love. Let us keep in closest touch with Him in these last days of time and be ready at a moment's warning to meet Him in the air.

Finally, the greatest fact in connection with Solomon's reign was that Solomon himself was greater than all his pageantry of pomp and circumstances that surrounded him. The man was more than the king on the throne. It was not to see his splendor that the nations came, but to hear his wisdom and to come in contact with his personal worth. There are

very few of whom this is true. Most persons are made up of their surroundings and their dress. Real beauty when unadorned is adorned the most, and when adorned it transcends its setting. This is supremely true of Jesus only. Greater than all the greatness that surrounds Him, He Himself is "outstanding among ten thousand" (Song of Solomon 5:10), and "altogether lovely" (5:16)! Oh, have we seen Him in His beauty (Isaiah 33:17)? Do we know Him in His love? Are we longing for Him more than for all He is going to bring, and can we truly say with the old seraphic song,

The bride eyes not her garment,  
But her dear bridegroom's face.  
I will not gaze on the glory,  
But on the King of Grace;  
Not on the crown He giveth,  
But on His pierced hand.  
The Lamb is all the glory  
In Emmanuel's land.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

**What was Solomon's attitude toward Adonijah and why was he put to death?**

**How was Joab's life to be regarded?**

**How did Shimei forfeit his life?**

**What is said of the kingdom after Solomon took away those that tried to undermine it?**

1 Kings 2:46

**What is true beauty in the life of a Christian?**

### **1 Kings 3:1-4:34**

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)*

*At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."*

*Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day."*

*Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"*

*The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." (1 Kings 3:5-14)*

This passage gives the first keynote of Solomon's inner life. The sacred historian has already given us a picture of his inauguration and the splendors of his throne, but here we get a glimpse of his heart and see the true man who was greater than the kingdom.

His first important act was to go to Gibeon, the seat of the ancient tabernacle and, up to this time, the public place of worship, to offer sacrifice and wait upon God for His message and commission. The journey was made with splendid display, as was usual with Solomon in all he did, and the sacrifices were marked by great magnificence, no less than a thousand victims being offered upon the altar during the days of this great feast. It was intended as an act of public acknowledgement of Jehovah as the true king whom he, like David, his father, only represented. And God was pleased to accept this act of homage and recognition and to bless the king and his kingdom.

We see, in the language which he uses in respect to his father, David, a recognition of God's goodness to his father, David, and to himself, as the son and successor, and especially of the principles of righteousness and uprightness which

God required in the administration of the king. He speaks of God's goodness to him as a great mercy and refers to the fact that this mercy was extended to David as he walked in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart. These are the true principles which form the foundation of all right government, and Solomon wisely recognized them as the elements of David's prosperity and strength, and as those which must enter into his administration also.

No government deserves to be prospered or can expect permanency of blessing which is founded upon injustice or any kind of wrong. We talk about our hard times and our national troubles as the results of political errors and the outworking of financial theories and principles. These things are God's judicial chastenings for the selfishness of His people. It is because we do not use the blessing He bestows and the means He supplies for the real object which alone is dear to Him, of building up His kingdom and blessing mankind with the gospel and the truth, that He takes them away from us and sends distress of nations with perplexity. Solomon himself crystallized this principle into an eternal epigram when he said, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Solomon recognized therefore the necessity of righteousness and uprightness and he traced his throne and the blessing that had brought him to it not to any merit of his own but to the sovereign goodness of the King of kings, his father's God and his.

"But I," he says, "am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties" (1 Kings 3:7). This is the language of true modesty, and modesty is always a sign of true worth. Alas, it is rare that we hear such language on the part of young men. Youth is usually self-conscious and full of assurance of its own strength and sufficiency, and it has to go through the discipline of suffering and failure before it learns to take the true place of humility which brings greatness and blessing.

Happily Solomon had learned this lesson. All God's most honored servants have learned it, too. Moses, in the confidence of his early enthusiasm, when he sprang to the front unbidden and slew the Egyptian that oppressed his brother, was not fit for this task. But Moses, shrinking back and saying, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, . . . send someone else to do it" (Exodus 4:10, 13), was the man that God wanted for this high commission. Jeremiah, the last of Israel's prophets, repeated almost the very words of Solomon as he cried, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, ... I am only a child," (Jeremiah 1:6), and Jeremiah became the greatest of the prophets of his country and was recognized as the patron spirit of Jerusalem in her darkest days of sorrow. Paul himself, the leader of the great missionary host, took his name of Paul just because it means "little." And as he grew riper and richer in his high and heavenly life and work he grew downward until he called himself, first, "not even [deserving] to be called an apostle" (1 Corinthians 15:9), next "less than the least of all God's people" (Ephesians 3:8), and, at last, the "worst of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:16). Humility is not self-degradation. It is self-forgetfulness, not counting upon ourselves at all, but looking only unto Jesus as our Strength, our Wisdom, and our All in All.

There was but one thing that he asked. He might have asked much more. He might have asked anything he would, for God had given him a mighty option and said, "Ask for whatever you want" (1 Kings 3:5). And so He comes to us sometimes and tests us through our very prayers. Should He come to you just now with that splendid offer and say, "Ask for whatever you want," what would your answer be? What was the first thing you asked this morning? The last thing you breathed in prayer last night? What is the desire that would spring to your lips if God met you with this unlimited proffer, "Ask for whatever you want"? Solomon's answer was ready. He had but one desire, one prayer, namely, that he might have from God the grace, the strength, the power, the wisdom, to meet the situation in which God had placed him, to be equal to his post, to be God's best in the great trust which had been committed to his hands. He did not ask anything for himself, but all for his high calling and great work. What he wanted was the power to meet God's will and satisfy God's expectation concerning his life.

Surely this is the spirit of a single-hearted life, a life that has been rightly poised in perfect conformity with the will of God. The wisdom which Solomon asked just means the power to use the right means to bring about the right end. It needs much wisdom to get the right end and aim in life, and then it needs much more to attain it. This is what Solomon asked, that he might rightly understand the great purpose of his being, and then that he might know how to accomplish it. Surely this includes all that is worth living for. Surely this is the burden of Solomon's deepest teachings in the volume that afterwards came from his pen in the collection of his wisest sayings—the burden that runs through it all:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 9:10)

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil. (8:13)

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom,  
the man who gains understanding,  
for she is more profitable than silver  
and yields better returns than gold.  
She is more precious than rubies;  
nothing you desire can compare with her.  
Long life is in her right hand;  
in her left hand are riches and honor.  
Her ways are pleasant ways,

and all her paths are peace.  
She is a tree of life to those who embrace her;  
those who lay hold of her will be blessed.  
(3:13-18)

God has left to us a greater promise. He has given us as the Wisdom of God nothing less than the very person of his own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30), and who comes to live in us and work out in our lives the very thought of God for us in all its fullness, blessedness and strength. It is not our wisdom that He gives us. It is not even the abstract quality of a higher sense, but it is a living personal mind, the very mind and thought and heart of Christ within us to lead us and guide us in all His will and work out for us and in us, all His plan. This is the wisdom we may have if we but truly seek Him, and the life thus guided and thus blessed can never fail of reaching God's highest thought and life's highest possibilities. It is this high purpose that saves us from a thousand distractions and complications. It is because we want so many other things that we miss them and the chief thing, too. The greatest blessing that can come to a soul is to desire only God and God's will and glory. It was this that brought Solomon's answer so swiftly to him from heaven. God saw his heart was true and He could afford to bless him not only with what he asked, but with much more besides.

He gave to Solomon the thing he asked—wisdom—such as none ever before or none afterward possessed. And it was not long until He vindicated this wisdom by putting Solomon into situations where it was sorely tested and where it was fully vindicated. Before another sun had set there came to him two women with a question which was surely enough to try the heart of the wisest judge. Both were disputing the ownership of their alleged child, and both seemed to the outward eye to love it with equal fondness. Instinctively did the true test come to the wise king. Commanding a sword to be brought he offered to divide the child in two and give to each a half. It was then that the mother heart shone out in all its strength. "Please," she cried, "my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" (1 Kings 3:26), and in that surrender she showed herself the mother and won what she had yielded. And so God will bring to you many a test in answer to your prayers. You ask Him for patience and He will immediately put you in a position where you will need great patience. And if you allow Him He will give it to you. You ask Him for joy and He will put you in a place where all earthly joy will fail you and you shall be thrown upon Him for comfort, peace and victory. You ask Him for love and He will probably test you by the most unloving things on the part of others and then He will give you His love to triumph over unkindness and wrong. You ask him for wisdom and He will bring you up to a situation so full of perplexities and difficulties as to appall you. But this is just where His wisdom will shine out and you will go through in victory while you cry, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

But God not only answered Solomon's request, but expressed His peculiar approval of Solomon's spirit and Solomon's prayer. He was delighted with it because of what Solomon had not asked. There is quite as much in what we do not say as what we do say. The silences of our prayers are more eloquent than their words. How God must grow tired of our petulant and peevish repetitions of worry and anxious care and the thousand things we reiterate in His ears about which He knows already and has long ago provided. This is what the Psalmist meant in that beautiful sentence in Psalm 37:7, "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." In the margin it is "Be silent unto the LORD." Hold your peace, stop your pleading, teasing, feeble complaints and prayers. Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things (Matthew 6:32), and if you will only think for Him, you will find Him thinking much more for you.

But, further, God gave Solomon the very things he had not asked. He said unto him, "I will give what you have not asked for—both riches and honor— so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings" (1 Kings 3:13). So when we cease to think about the temporal needs of this earthly life, God gives them to us with an abundance that we never can know as long as we are anxious and worried concerning them. Indeed, when we cry too much for them, we are better without them; but when we care supremely for Him and His kingdom, then they lie lightly in our hands and do not become a snare but only a means of greater blessing, and He is pleased to add them to us. This is the very essence of the Master's perfect and lofty teaching in the Sermon on the Mount all summed up in our text, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33), or, as it is better expressed by the other evangelists, "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God" (Luke 12:31, KJV). It is the only thing to seek; and "all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33, KJV). It is to be noted that the word "added" is used. This looks as though in many cases they might not be given until later in our history, namely, in that millennial day when the earthly shall be added to the heavenly, and the material shall crown the spiritual inheritance of the saints. This would be true to the type, for Solomon, who was so richly endowed with these outward blessings, was the special type of the millennial age when we shall receive the glory and the hundredfold for every sacrifice and deprivation here.

In conclusion, the story of Solomon's choice speaks to each of us as we stand today in the same place of difficult perplexity or high and holy trust. Each of us, like him, has a kingdom for which we are unequal and insufficient of ourselves. Perhaps it is the kingdom of your own soul, and you feel that you are not wise enough or strong enough to sway the scepter over your thoughts and passions and will. Bring it to Him, as Solomon did. Ask Him for but one thing: to make you equal to your post, to glorify Himself in you and enable you as a helpless little child to please Him and

accomplish the real purpose of your being and trust Him for all besides. Then you will surely find the blessing that Solomon found and the addition which so enriched his life.

Perhaps it is the kingdom of your home. Perhaps you are an anxious and troubled mother with many an encompassing difficulty, uncongenial surroundings, poverty, toil, lack of sympathy and help and a thousand temptations surrounding the path of those you love, until your heart sinks and shrinks, and you cry, "Lord, I know not how to go out or come in. I am but a little child. Oh, give me wisdom. Whatever else you withhold help me to be my best," and God will hear you and bless you and make you a blessing to your household and help to save your loved ones and lead them up to Him. Perhaps you are a Christian worker in some place of difficult responsibility, feeling that you are unequal to the obligations that rest upon you and the expectations of those that look to you. Go to Gibeon. Bring a simple, single heart. Ask for but one thing, that you may please and glorify God and be enabled to do His perfect will, and He that answered Solomon will enable you for all His perfect will, will bless you and make you a blessing, and will add unto you all things. Or, perhaps, you are a young man or woman setting out in life with some new position opening to you, some place of important influence or service, some influential situation, some place of public trust. Oh, do not try to be the architect of your fortune. Like Solomon, begin with God. Hand over your life and all its possibilities to Him. He will take pride in being your Patron, and seeing you through and some day rejoicing with you amid the raptures of the glory, because through His grace you have not run in vain (Galatians 2:2) nor labored in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

It was in accord with ancient Eastern practices that Solomon sealed many of his political alliances with marriages. **Was Solomon using good judgment when he married Pharaoh's daughter? Why?**

**What was the unquestionable good brought out in the first few verses that Solomon is to be praised for and to be imitated?**

1 Kings 3:3

**Did Solomon have wisdom because he asked for it and wealth because he did not ask for it?**

**How did the people react to Solomon after they saw that he had the wisdom of God?**

1 Kings 3:28

Chapter four contains an enumeration of the officers who served Solomon, and upheld the glory of his throne; and then, the manner in which the whole country provided for the maintenance of his household, Judah and Israel being multiplied and full of joy. The king's authority extends as far as the Euphrates. Peace reigns all around. The wisdom and understanding which God had given him surpassed all that was known in the world; so that from the ends of the earth they came to hear the wisdom of his lips.

His proverbs, his songs, and his knowledge, bore testimony to the excellent spirit with which God had endowed the king. His throne is established, and the glory of the son of David abounds. The Gentiles now—the king of Tyre, emblematic of the world and its desirable things—are at Solomon's disposal, and apply themselves joyfully to the fulfillment of the king of Israel's projects, and to his service in building the house of Jehovah. (J. N. Darby) **Will there be a similar reaction of the people when Christ returns to set up his Millennial Kingdom here on earth?**

The territories of his kingdom were large and its subject countries many; so it was foretold that he should *rule from sea to sea*, Ps. 72:8-11. Solomon reigned over all the neighboring kingdoms, who were his subjects by force. All the kings from the river Euphrates, northeast to the border of Egypt southwest, added to his wealth by serving him, and bringing him presents, v. 21. He had *peace on all sides*, v. 24. Solomon, in this, prefigured Christ, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and hidden for use; for he is *made for us wisdom from God*. (Matthew Henry) **Why is it said to us in Matt. 12:42 "a greater than Solomon is here."**

Ps. 72      Ps. 122      Rom. 8:17

### **1 Kings 5:1-9:28**

The first great work of Solomon after the establishment of his throne was to carry out the great commission that had been entrusted to him by David—the erection of the temple. He entered upon this work in the third year of his reign and completed it in the 11<sup>th</sup>, so that it occupied between seven and eight years up to the day of its dedication, which was delayed a few months in order to make it coincide with the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the most stupendous work of his reign and his grandest monument. As a work of unequalled magnificence it might well challenge the wonder of the world, and as an object lesson of spiritual truth it is full of instruction for the Christian's heart.

Eighty thousand workmen were employed in the mountains as hewers of wood, 70,000 more as carriers, while 3,300 were overseers, and, in addition to this, we read of another levy of 30,000 men who went by monthly courses. This vast army of nearly 200,000 men were employed for years in this stupendous undertaking.

The temple was erected on Mount Moriah, the sacred spot where Abraham offered up Isaac, and where Araunah so generously offered his threshing floor, his oxen and his implements, to sacrifice to the Lord. As a place of loving sacrifice it was especially dear to Jehovah and became the monument of His presence and glory. The naked rock of the summit was selected as the spot for the Holy of Holies (Most Holy Place, NIV) and the ark of the covenant to rest. The slope below was leveled for the site of the Holy Place and the declivity (downward slope) of the hill was leveled up by costly masonry along the east and south side of the mountain, rising in sheer walls several hundred feet high. And the space enclosed in the foundation walls filled up with innumerable arches of stone and interlacing walls to support the superstructure. In addition, vast reservoirs were built here and connected by aqueducts with springs in Bethlehem, by which enormous supplies of water were brought to the city for the temple service and the use of the king and his household.

A large surrounding space of about 500 by 550 feet (152 by 168 meters) was enclosed with a wall of stone and planted with trees as the temple area, and within this on a higher plane the temple itself rose in costly splendor, a shining mass of marble and gold.

The chambers of the priests were built around the outer walls, but slightly detached from them. All the contents of the temple were similar to the tabernacle, and the order of worship the same, it all being designed to typify Christ and the great principles of redemption.

The materials were all prepared completely before they were brought to the site. Every stone was squared and beveled and fitted for its place. Every piece of timber was hewed, polished and, doubtless, marked and numbered for its precise position in the framework. The timber was floated down the mountain streams to the Mediterranean and then floated in rafts to Joppa and forwarded to Jerusalem. The stones in like manner were quarried in the excavations under the hill and brought to their place ready for erection. The brass work was cast in the Jordan valley north of Jerusalem.

Finally, when the building was ready for erection, it was simply put together according to the plan already prepared and the materials fitted to hand, as we see in the beautiful striking description in First Kings 6:7, "In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built." Silently as a great tree would grow in a forest this mighty edifice arose as if by invisible hands, without the din and roar of the hammer and the workman's tool, and all was simply and silently beautiful as God's great handiwork of creation, as the winter bursts into the summer and the vegetation rises from the ground. The beautiful spiritual teaching of this we shall afterwards see, but the very conception is thrilling, and is finely described in Bishop Heber's familiar lines,

No sound was heard, no ponderous axe was swung.  
Like some tall palm the stately fabric sprung.

Finally the house was ready and the work was done. There was no undue haste in its dedication, but they calmly waited until the proper season, the Feast of Tabernacles. Then all Israel gathered—from the regions of the tribes, from the vast new empire, from the maritime colonies, from land and sea. They gathered at Jerusalem for the most magnificent event in their national history. When the appointed day had come Solomon himself, clothed in robes of spotless white and assuming for the time the office of the priest as well as the king, took charge of the inauguration ceremonies accompanied by a great company of priests and vast choirs of singers. With the princes and the people of Israel on every side he stood upon the platform. The opening chorus of praise was about to begin the service, when suddenly it was perceived that God Himself had already descended and taken possession of the building, for all the house was filled with a cloud of deepest darkness, and with a thrill of awe and unutterable joy all recognized the awful but glorious symbol of Jehovah's immediate presence. God had come to dedicate His own temple. As soon as Solomon recovered from the deep prostration of this glorious manifestation he proceeded to utter the wonderful prayer of dedication, which seemed inspired of the Holy Spirit and which covered all the future of his people. This was followed by the sacrifice on an enormous scale of no less than 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, until the altar became too small and the whole court was transformed into a place of sacrifice. Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house, and as the people witnessed the manifest presence and power of God they fell upon their faces and worshiped the Lord, saying, "For he is good, For His love endures forever" (2 Chronicles 7:3).

The solemn service closed with a personal revelation of God to Solomon, as He had appeared before to him at Gibeon, in which God was pleased to accept his prayer and the house that he had built and to renew His covenant with him and the promise of His blessing so long as he should walk in heavenly obedience.

Henceforth, this building became the center of Israel's national life and worship, and we find the Psalms breathing the most ardent devotion and longing for the house of God in such expressions as this, "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). To them it was the center of their religious affections, associations and hopes. We are permitted to know God more directly; but that was the steppingstone by which they reached His throne and the mirror

through which they saw the reflection of His glory, although, alas, at length they lost the thought of Him in the outward form, and even the very temple had to perish because it stood between them and the Lord Himself.

### *Spiritual Significance And Practical Lessons*

1. It expressed the presence of God with Israel as their covenant God.
2. It was intended to foreshadow the Church, the spiritual house of the future, in which God now dwells through the Holy Spirit.
3. It represented the individual believer as the temple of the Holy Spirit, the house which God values most and in which He loves to dwell, for "don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).
4. It was intended to represent the glorified Church. The tabernacle represented the earthly Church amid the trials and vicissitudes of this wilderness life. The temple represented the triumphant Church, the new Jerusalem above, when the trial and change shall all be passed and Christ in more than Solomon's glory shall come to share with His people the sovereignty of a regenerated world.

For us as individuals, however, the chief lesson is the third. And we may, through the indwelling of Christ in our hearts, anticipate the fourth, and enter even here into something of the fullness of the heavenly state, for we are recognized in the Scriptures as having passed within the veil and are dwelling even now in the heavenlies seated with our risen Lord upon the throne.

There are several touching lessons for us as individuals in the inspired reference to Solomon's temple.

(a) There is much suggestive teaching in the beautiful fact that the temple was built without the noise of materials already brought to hand. This is a perfect type of the processes of grace by which we are built up in Christ to be habitations of God through the Spirit. We do not have to frame and forge our spiritual graces by struggling effort. All these things are ready-made for us in Christ and brought to us by the Holy Spirit for us to put on moment by moment and day by day as we take Him in all His fullness and make real in our experience such precious verses as these:

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:14)

Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. (John 1:16)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:3)

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge,... (1:5-7)

The teaching of all these passages and many more is most clear and simple, namely, that Christ Himself has provided and laid up for us the grace, the wisdom, the faith, the love, the strength and the courage that we need in each new situation of life, and we have simply to take and use that which is ours by faith, and thus put together the stones which He has made and grow up into the immeasurable stature of the fullness of Christ.

(b) Again, there is much beautiful teaching in the fact that when the ark was moved into its resting place in the temple, the staves by which it was carried through the wilderness were taken out and were no longer visible to the eyes of the worshipers. The ark had ceased its journeyings and was forever at rest. And so the psalm triumphantly exclaims, "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned" (132:14). Oh, reader, it tells you that you may reach that place where Christ shall fix His dwelling in your heart to leave no more, where the staves of your wandering life shall be withdrawn and He in you and you in Him shall be at home forever.

(c) There was nothing in the ark but the tables of the covenant. Even the pot of manna that had been there before, as a memorial of the wilderness life, was gone. Even the budding rod of Aaron, which was the reminder of their temptations in the wilderness and, perhaps, also, which was suggestive of the stage of budding and blossoming faith, but not a complete fulfillment, was gone, too. There was nothing there but the white tablets with God's will inscribed upon them, which only spoke of one thing, a heart wholly consecrated and having only one desire, and that to glorify God and do His will.

Is not this the place to which we want to come: where we are not seeking any blessing, where even the pot of manna and the thought of our wilderness needs shall be forgotten, and even Aaron's rod of prayer shall be changed to praise and



rest, and our one object shall be, as our Master's, to do the Father's will? We cannot even imagine Christ having any anxious care about Himself in any regard. He had but one business and that was to bless God and bless others. Oh, when we get there we shall be saved from all our sorrows, from all our cares, from all our conflicts, and the one deep consciousness of our whole being shall be, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (40:8).

(d) We read once more that when the glory of the Lord filled the house the priests could not stand to minister because the cloud of the "glory of the LORD filled his temple" (1 Kings 8:11). This is the secret of getting rid of self. Get filled with God and then there will be no room for you. Do not try to turn yourself out but take Him in, and sin and self will go in the blessedness and glory of a divine preoccupation.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

A very interesting study is that of comparing God's dwelling places throughout the Bible. The first is *the Tabernacle*, of which He said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." This was the first time that God had dwelt amongst men. He came down to visit Adam in Eden, when He walked in the garden in the cool of the day. Enoch and Noah walked with God, and He called Abraham His friend; but He had never before come down to dwell. In Gen. 9:27, where it is prophesied, "He shall dwell in the tents of Shem," there may be an allusion to the Tabernacle. For more than five hundred years it was His dwelling place on earth. He went "from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another," until He gave directions for Solomon to build Him a house, and *the Temple* became His sanctuary, a "palace, . . . not for man, but for the Lord God" (1 Chron. 29:1).

These two, the Tabernacle and the Temple, were successively His dwelling place in Old Testament times. But after many years had elapsed *the Lord Jesus Christ* came; and in Him, on earth as now in heaven, "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." We read that "the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us." He was Emmanuel, God with us, the Antitype (that which was foreshadowed) of the Tabernacle and also of the Temple; for He was "greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:6), and compares Himself to it more than once. "Destroy this temple," He said, "and in three days I will raise it up; . . . but He spoke of the temple of His body." For thirty-three years He walked this earth, and when He ascended, God came to dwell in another temple. He now dwells in *the Church*, not merely in the bodies of individual believers which are the temples of the Holy Ghost, but in "the Church, which is His body." As we read in Eph. 2:20-22, "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit." It has been pointed out that in this passage we have the Church as the antitype both of the Temple and the Tabernacle. In verse 22 there is a building already completed in which God now dwells—a building set up like the Tabernacle on desert sands. In verse 21 a Temple is spoken of which is still growing, and which will only be completed when He presents to Himself "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." The Tabernacle seems to be the type (foreshadow) of Christ and His Church now; the Temple, of Christ and His Church in resurrection glory, as we read in Peter, "Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house." It is not yet finished. As Solomon's Temple "was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither"—or "at the quarry," as we read in the Revised Version—so each stone in the Temple must be quarried, cut, and shaped below.

Solomon himself adopted the plan which he recommends in Prov. 24, "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field, and afterwards build thine house." God is doing this now. The field is the world, and the stones are one by one being made ready here.

We are told of the vessels of the Temple that "in the plain of Jordan did the king cast them in the clay ground"; and so must it be with "the vessels of mercy which He had afore prepared unto glory." All the molding and the cutting must be done here; and the building will not be completed till every stone is finished, and "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!" The corner stone in Eph. 2 is the foundation stone, and speaks of His first coming; but the head stone of the corner, in Ps. 118, and the headstone spoken of in Zech. 4, point to His second coming.

There is mention of a *future dwelling place* in Ezek. 37:26, 27, and other similar passages, where God promises that His sanctuary shall be in the midst of Israel. In Rev. 15 John sees "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven"; and in chapter 21 he hears a voice saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them." We cannot tell how far these refer to the glorified Church; but we know that when He comes and the dead in Christ are raised, and we which are alive and remain are "caught up to meet the Lord in the air," we shall never again be separated from Him; for "so shall we ever be with the Lord." John tells us in the same chapter of Revelation that in the New Jerusalem he "saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"; and we know that the Lord Jesus Christ's prayer will then have been fulfilled, "that they all may be one: as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." It may be therefore that this future temple is Christ and His Church.

When Adam fell, the Lord said, "Behold, the man is become as one of us"; and so he was driven away from the tree of life. But Christ's prayer in John is "that they also may be one in us"; and in Revelation man is welcomed back to the tree of life, and Christ's prayer is answered.

In studying these dwelling places—the Tabernacle, the Temple, our Lord Himself, and the Church—we may trace many thoughts through each one, comparing them and contrasting them with one another.

First, there is *the pattern* for each. Moses is told to make the Tabernacle, and all its vessels, after the pattern which was shown him in the Mount (Exod. 25:9, 40). When David gave to Solomon the plan for every part of the Temple, he said, "All this . . . the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern." We know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the express image of God's person, and every member of the Church is to be conformed to the image of His Son, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." In God's dwelling place there is no place for man's designs or inventions. The pattern for all is Christ Himself.

There is *preparation* in each case. The Tabernacle must have been in God's mind when He told the people to ask of the Egyptians jewels of gold and jewels of silver; and when He put it into the hearts of their late oppressors to grant them all that they asked. He had told Abraham that they should "come out with great substance"; and thus when in Exodus 25. He told them to bring an offering, they were well provided. So when God asks us to give Him something, He always gives it to us first. He makes preparation, and then allows us to say we will "prepare Him an habitation." When the materials had been given, He called out Bezaleel, whom He had filled "with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise curious works," and put in his heart that he might teach others, and that the work might be done according to God's pattern.

David made great preparation for the Temple; for he said, "The house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries; I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death" (1 Chron. 22:5). Six times over in 1 Chron. 29 this preparation is mentioned: for when David had prepared, the people also made preparation, and they could say, as their fathers in the wilderness might have done, "All this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thine holy Name, cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own." This is the Bible meaning of consecration, filling our hand from God's hand, and then offering it to Him again (1 Chron. 29:5, 14, *margin*), Solomon also, as we have seen, made careful preparation before he began to build the house.

When the Lord Jesus came and tabernacled amongst men, He said, "A body hast Thou prepared Me." His going forth was "prepared as the morning"; and Simeon could say, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people." Now God dwells in "a people prepared for the Lord"—on earth in humiliation, as in the Tabernacle; by-and-by in the glory, as in the Temple when He will "make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy which He had afore prepared unto glory." There is preparation also for God's future dwelling place. In Isa. 2:2, we read, "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be prepared (*margin*) in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it"; and in Rev. 21:2, 3, John sees "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"; and at the same time he hears "a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men."

Above the Tabernacle rested the Shekinah *cloud* that indicated God's presence. When Moses set up the Tabernacle, we read that "a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle; and Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle."

When all the work that Solomon made for the house of the Lord was finished, and everything was brought in and put in its place, and the Temple dedicated to God, "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."

The bright cloud overshadowed the Lord Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration; and as in the wilderness God spake to Israel out of the cloud, so He spake to the disciples: "And, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him." The cloud was seen again when the Lord Jesus ascended; for while the disciples were gathered around Him on the mount of Olives, "He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

We read in 1 Cor. 10:2 that all the children of Israel "were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea"; and this seems to indicate that the cloud was a type of the Holy Spirit, for "by one Spirit art: we all baptized into one body." Lastly in John's vision of the things which shall be hereafter, we read that "the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power: and no man was able to enter into the temple" (Rev. 15:8).

Gold, which is taken to typify the divine, is found in each. The boards of the Tabernacle were overlaid with gold; also the golden altar, the table of showbread, and the ark, while the mercy-seat and the candle-stick were of pure gold.

None of the wood, which is taken to represent humanity, could be seen in either the Tabernacle or in the Temple; and the latter "there was no stone seen." All was overlaid with pure gold. Of our Lord Himself we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He was the God-man; and the gold, the divine, though often hidden from view, was throughout His whole life seen in the miracles He wrought and the words He spoke. On the

mount of Transfiguration its full glory was seen; and even when "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," the centurion and they that were with Him said, "Truly this was the Son of God."

As God's dwelling place now, the Church too needs the gold; and every member of that Church must be born again, and be a partaker of the divine nature.

When in Rev. 3 Christ grieves over the lukewarmness of the Laodiceans, He says, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed; . . . and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see": and we read in 1 Cor. 3 that at the Judgment-seat of Christ, when the works of believers will be tested, the gold, silver, and precious stones, will abide the fire. In Solomon's temple "the floor of the house he overlaid with gold within and without"; and the priests' feet stood upon it, instead of as in the Tabernacle, on the sand of the desert: while in the New Jerusalem, in which the Lord God Himself and the Lamb are the temple, we read that the street of the city was pure gold.

The *exterior* of these dwelling places may well be compared and contrasted. The Tabernacle was covered with the badger skins, and the beauties within were hidden. There could have been nothing attractive in its appearance; and it was very different from the glory of the temple of Solomon, which was "garnished with precious stones for beauty."

Our Lord when He was on earth was like the Tabernacle, so that the prophet could say, "When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men. . . . He hid, as it were, His face from us (*marg.*); He was despised, and we esteemed Him not"—so is it with the Church now. "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord"; and in her pilgrim character the Church too is despised and rejected of men. The little company at Ephesus was not thought to be of much importance. As the Apostle wrote his letter to them, and compared them to the Temple and the Tabernacle, probably he was thinking of that other temple at Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the world, of which we read in Acts 19, Demetrius feared "that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." That temple has long since been destroyed, and we can see its remains in the British Museum; but the believers at Ephesus formed part of a temple which, like Solomon's, will be "exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries." When in resurrection-glory Christ comes with His Church, to be admired in all them that believe, the beauty of that Temple will be seen by the whole universe.

(Study of the Types, Ada R. Habershon)

**Does the temple express the presence of God with Israel as their covenant God?**

**Does the temple foreshadow the Church, the spiritual house of the future, in which God now dwells through the Holy Spirit?**

**Does the temple represent the individual believer as the temple of the Holy Spirit, the house which God values most and in which He loves to dwell, for "don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)?**

**Does the temple represent the future glorified Church?**

**Show how God put honor upon the ark, and owned it as a token of His presence.**

1 Kings 8:10-11

**Show how God worked in David's life and then in Solomon's to build the temple. Did Solomon give up all right, title, interest, claim or demand he may have had in the building of this temple? Is this a good example for us to show who deserves the credit for any work that God has laid on our heart to do?**

1 Kings 8:14-30

**What else was the temple used for besides being a house of sacrifice?**

1 Kings 8:20-54    Isa. 56:7    Matt. 21:13

**Was there acceptance by God of Solomon's and the people's prayers and sacrifice before the Lord?**

1 Kings 9:1-9    2 Chr. 7:1

### **1 Kings 10:1-13**

The story of the Queen of Sheba is authenticated by our Lord's direct allusion to it in the New Testament (Matthew 12:42), and in the same passage He clearly intimates that Solomon in this incident of his life was a type (foreshadow) of a Greater than he. This is also brought out very clearly in a single phrase in the first verse of the narrative in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Kings, where it is said that "When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation

to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions." That phrase, "his relation to the name of the LORD," identifies Solomon with the Lord in her thinking, and makes it evident that she thought of him not so much as a wonderful man and a glorious king but rather the representative of Jehovah, the true theocratic King of Israel. We are to look at this passage, therefore, as typical of the Lord Jesus Christ, both in His present relation to the world, which He has redeemed, and more especially in His future relation, when He shall come again in a glory grander than Solomon ever knew.

This picture represents the cry of the nations after God. Her longing to meet this wonderful man was just the expression of her deep desire to find someone that could meet the needs of her heart and satisfy the doubts and perplexities of her troubled and burdened mind. The world's cry is, like the Greeks of old, "We would like to see Jesus" (John 12:21). It does not know that this is its cry, but it is all the same. In the blind idolatries and stupid superstitions of the heathen world, we see many groping after God according to the best light and truest conception they know. It is not true that the heathen are ready to welcome the gospel of Jesus Christ, but it is true that their hearts are earnestly seeking for something which Christ alone can satisfy. Let us send the true light and it will awaken a response in every true heart.

Again, the Queen of Sheba represented the individual seeking God and coming to Him with his hard questions and consecrated offerings. Doubtless, also, she represents that grander scene which the millennial ages are to unfold when her people and all the nations of the earth shall come as she came to Jerusalem to visit not Solomon but the greater King, to lay their tribute at the feet of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This was the vision that Isaiah saw down the distant future, and of which he wrote so often in glowing characters, "Some [will come] from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan" (49:12). "Your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm" (60:4). "Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD" (60:6).

She did not come empty-handed, but she brought an offering to the great king (1 Kings 10:2, 10). She brought the best she had. Her costly treasures of gold and more precious spices express the finer figures of the heart's devotion and love. It may seem strange that she should bring such a costly gift to one who did not need it, for he was richer far than she. But that is just the reason God asks our gifts. He does not go begging for help for His cause because He is in distress, but He tells us that all the fowls of the mountain are His, the cattle upon a thousand hills (Psalms 50:10-11) and all the gold of earth's mines, and that He asks our offerings not for His sake, but for ours, that we may be kingly, too, and like Him in our largeness of heart and fellowship of service. He gives us the privilege of taking part with Him in the work of these momentous days. Some day we shall understand what a privilege and honor it was. We are to bring Him our gifts as the recognition of His sovereignty and our trust and love, and He, like Solomon, will show His character by giving back to us more than we brought. You may talk of sentimental piety and keep your money to yourself, but the truth is, God knows and you know, also, that you mean it just to the extent to which you are willing to pay for it and sacrifice for it. The test of love forever must be action and sacrifice. Jesus asks something of us, nay, He asks everything of us as a guarantee that we mean it with all our hearts and then He treats us on the same principle and gives us all that He has. When the woman of Samaria met the Lord, He asked something of her before He blessed and saved her. He required her to give Him a draught of water and He gave her in return an ocean of living water. The highest spiritual experience is not to receive merely, but it is to give. "My lover is mine" is not so deep a place of holy blessing as to be able to add, "My lover is mine and I am his" (Song of Songs 2:16). The very height of rapture is the single utterance of entire surrender, "I belong to my lover" (7:10).

She sought light upon her hard questions (1 Kings 10:1). There were many things that she longed to know. Doubtless she asked him about that great God whose name was written upon the spangled skies of her southern home but whose nature was unknown to her. Doubtless she asked him about herself and her strangely confused condition, the perplexities of her struggling soul, how to satisfy her accusing conscience, how to resist her fierce temptations, how to be right, how to be happy, and, doubtless, she asked him about the great future, the destiny of the soul and the hopes and fears that look out upon the eternal future; all this which has perplexed the ages, no doubt, was brought to him for the searching light of truth and wisdom from above. We, too, have our hard questions to bring to Christ. We need keep nothing back, for He has said that we may tell Him of all our cares, perplexities and sorrows, and that He will never send us away unbled.

She sought Solomon's own personal acquaintance and fellowship (10:2). It was not merely truth that she wanted to know, but she wanted to meet a living heart that had made all this truth real and proved all these hard questions in the ordeal of life. And so it is not so much knowledge and light we need as it is Jesus Himself. The heart is reaching out for a Person, One strong enough and wise enough for us to lean all our weight upon and One tender and true enough for us to feel we may come to and open our heart with all its wounds and even with all its sin. This she found in Solomon and this we find in Jesus Christ.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

**What do you think it meant when it said of the Queen of Sheba; "there was no more spirit in her" (1 Kings 10:5)?**

## 1 Kings 10:14-11:25

*The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. (1 Kings 11:2-10)*

Like some splendid ruin reminding us of the stately temple that once stood there, like some glorious sunrise ending in lurid tempests, like some noble ship sailing away amid waving pennants and cheering multitudes and then disappearing in mid-ocean and leaving no trace behind, so Solomon's career became darkened with the deepest shadows as it neared its close, and ended at last in awful mystery. No man, perhaps, would dare to say that Solomon was lost; but no man may affirm that Solomon was saved. Like a ship that founders in mid-ocean, he sank out of sight in the impenetrable darkness of apostasy and divine judgment.

All through the ages God has been looking for someone to meet His expectation and satisfy His ideal of a true man, but the race has always failed him. Adam stepped upon the scene encompassed with every proof of God's goodness, love and care, but e'er the sun had fairly risen the light went out in the dark eclipse of sin and ruin for the race. Abraham was chosen to be the peculiar type of faith, but Abraham failed in the place where he should have been strongest and left the old human blot upon his imperfect record. Moses led forth a new election of redeemed and chosen people from bondage to freedom, and was honored to stand in the innermost presence of Jehovah face to face; but Moses failed in the very quality for which he was most remarkable and broke his own law, and so failed to win his inheritance in the Land of Promise. David, the man after God's own heart, the very type of Jesus Christ, the anointed King, stooped to the depths of a double crime and covered the closing years of his reign with clouds of domestic and national calamity.

And now Solomon, the glorious, the man who seemed above all other men to have reached the climax of human character and success—good and wise, successful and prosperous, enjoying the smile of heaven and the honor and admiration of the whole world—Solomon at last became the most stupendous failure of the human race. He closed his career in a mystery of sin, sorrow and utter failure, and left the heritage of strife, misfortune and judgment to the nation he had governed. In the lapse of centuries nine-tenths of that nation were exterminated, and the remaining tribes were driven from their land and left in sad humiliating captivity, the temple that he had reared became a heap of smoldering ashes and the city that he had glorified a derision and was condemned in the hands of his heathen foes. He was allowed to be the true type of the Son of man, earth's true King. Then the picture was shattered into fragments and thrown away that we might know that it was only a transient picture, and that the best of men were only men, and the only ideal that can ever satisfy God or meet the needs of man is the divine Man, the blessed One, of whom all these were but broken images and imperfect types. What are some of the lessons that this sad story is fitted to teach?

It teaches the insufficiency of human wisdom and culture to save the race. Solomon was the wisest man, and one of the best of men; but Solomon failed, and the wisest and best will fail. The world is purchasing culture today but the golden age of art and literature has usually been an age of moral corruption and shameless sin. The worst elements in the heathen nations today are those who have had a touch of our civilization without the power of divine grace. The more you educate men, the more power you give them for mischief. It is not culture the world needs, but Christ. It is not even character the world needs, not even moral training, good examples, rigid discipline, self-improvement and higher standards of our virtue. All these will fail. There never was a higher standard than that of God's ancient law. There never was a stricter discipline than that of the Old Testament and God's rigid dealings with His chosen people. But they all failed. The only hope for the race is a new and heaven-born life; nay, more, the indwelling of the divine Person in the human nature, the union of Christ with our fallen life and the reliving His life in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Looking out upon the wreck of His race with a broken heart, Ezekiel saw the picture of the past, and his one hope for the future was this: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). But even that was not enough, for He adds: "And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (36:27). If ever wisdom and personal worth could save mankind, the experiment was truly tried in Solomon, and the lesson ended in their desperate failure.

One of the deepest sources of Solomon's failure was the spirit of pride and the love of display which were strongly marked in his life and formed the predominant tendency of his nature. His life was one constant pageant. His ambition was to surround his throne with unparalleled magnificence. His every movement was a triumphal procession. Robed in garments of white, superbly decorated and magnificently equipped with a stud of thousands of horses, splendid chariots and horsemen, and in all the display of oriental magnificence, he went from place to place in a blaze of glory. He lived in an atmosphere of luxury. Every vessel in his household was of purest gold. He was surrounded with the dazzling beauty of a thousand queens, and innumerable courtiers waited upon him and them and brought the homage of all nations to his feet.

Disobedience to God's law respecting marriage with the heathen and separation from the world had much to do with Solomon's fall. God had strictly forbidden ancient Israel to mingle with the surrounding nations in social life, and especially marriage; and He has forbidden us to be "yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Any man or woman who dares to disobey this divine command must take the consequences—an unhappy life and perhaps a lost eternity.

A spirit of easy compromise and unholy yielding to the influence of others, especially of his heathen wives, was another cause of Solomon's sin. It was bad enough to marry them and bring them into the heart of a holy nation. It was much worse to allow them to practice the heathen rites of their idolatrous religions with his consent. It was intolerable when he went so far as to erect costly temples for them for their abominable rites on the very brow of Olivet and overlooking the temple itself, for we are expressly told that he built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and the other of Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon. Right there in full view of the holy city were these monuments of cruel superstition which God had denounced in the most terrible terms; and in the fiery arms of the burning idol, the little children were offered in living sacrifice while their cries were drowned by the rude song of heathen music before the holy nation who had been taught for centuries to beware of these hideous rites. No wonder they called that hill the Mount of Offence.

*But this was not the worst. It was but one step more for him to join in these infamous idolatries and to yield to the pleadings of the wives he loved and throw himself without reserve into their abominable excesses.*

All this was heightened and aggravated by the fact that Solomon sank into these depths of sin after he had known the Lord, and, as the sacred record expresses it, after the Lord had appeared unto him twice.

How solemnly it reminds us of the peril of backsliding after we have received the deeper life of Christ, and the second blessing of the Holy Spirit. It was very sad when Israel went back after they were saved from Egypt, but it was more sad and terrible when they apostatized after they had won the land of Canaan. "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). Let us fear lest we too should become, like Solomon, beacons, useful only in the awful warning which our lives will hold forth to others. Let us shun the dangers which led him into sin and folly. Let us especially make sure to claim that which he missed, the utter surrender of our life from the world and self and sin and the indwelling life of God who is, through the Holy Spirit, within us.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

### **Was selfishness, greed and lust now creeping into Solomon's life?**

Matt. 10:38-39

### **Why was Solomon forbidden to marry foreign wives?**

Deut. 17:17    1 Kings 11:2

**Read Mathew 6:24-34 in conjunction with 1 Kings 10:14-29. Compare Solomon's wealth with that of Christians.**

**Was the enemies' attacks now upon Israel due to Solomon's disobedience to the Lord? Is there now reason for Solomon to fear enemies such as Hadad the Edomite and Rezon the Syrian? Can calamities come into our lives because of disobedience to the Lord?**

1 Kings 11:9-14

### **1 Kings 11:26-14:31**

*And he will give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit. (1 Kings 14:16)*

The Old Testament is a kaleidoscope of human character, revealing to us the failure of the human nature and driving us to Jesus Christ as the only remedy for man's lost condition. The story of Israel's fall is a true delineation of the roots and fruits of human depravity in every age. The text is a flashlight upon a dark life and the story that lies behind is a tragedy of curious and original wickedness. It is the picture of a brilliant man who went all wrong and set everybody else wrong too. A man who sinned and, worse than his own sin, made Israel sin—a sinful life and its more sinful influence on others. God help us to look a little at it as the pictures turn and see perhaps in some of them a mirror that will send us humble and contrite to the feet of Jesus. Not for themselves did these men fail on the shores of time, but as beacons for us, that we might receive instruction and warning and see our utter helplessness without Christ.

Jeroboam was the founder of the kingdom of Israel, which for several centuries went down deeper and deeper until at last it disappeared.

The first picture is a dramatic one—a young man is in Solomon's employ in the heyday of that king's glorious reign. He is gifted and talented and Solomon puts him over the laborers who are building the supporting terraces. Suddenly an old prophet meets the young contractor one day and seizing his outer garments he tears them into 12 pieces and hands back 10 of the pieces saying, "Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, ... he will have one tribe'" (1 Kings 11:31-32). Then he went on to say that if Jeroboam would be true to God, God would establish his kingdom and make it a witness for His name and a blessing to the world; but if he should be unfaithful, God would deal with him in judgment.

Ahijah the prophet, passes on, and young Jeroboam, with his head inflated and his soul on fire, instead of waiting for God to fulfill His part, began to concoct plans of rebellion among the jealous people of Ephraim, of whom he was one. Solomon found it out and sought his life. Jeroboam had to flee to Egypt, where he remained until the death of Solomon.

Solomon is in his grave, and his foolish son, Rehoboam, is on the throne. Rehoboam comes up to Shechem to meet the people and be crowned. Meanwhile they have sent for Jeroboam and have had a great convention, and talked it all over. They have made Jeroboam their spokesman and they tell the young king that if he will make some concessions they will serve him; but if he continues the forced labor and tribute of Solomon's reign they will have nothing to do with him.

Rehoboam takes three days to answer them and foolishly asks and acts upon the advice of some upstarts of his court and gives them an insolent reply.

Immediately the standard of rebellion is raised and an impassable gulf has come between the two sections of God's people. Rehoboam's agent is stoned to death and the king is compelled to flee for his life back to Jerusalem. The tribes have separated and nothing is left of David's house but the tribe of Judah and a portion of Benjamin and Simeon. Rehoboam attempts to put down the rebellion, but God forbids it, and for once he is advised by the prophet. Jeroboam is now established upon his throne, and it is a splendid throne—the best part of Palestine, the fertile valley of Esdraelon, the beautiful Samaria and the vast plains and territories reaching beyond the sea of Galilee to the borders of Tyre and Sidon.

God's promises were behind Jeroboam and he might have had one of the grandest careers of the Old Testament. But he begins by building powerful fortifications, showing that he is depending upon the arm of flesh to secure his kingdom rather than upon the Lord.

His next step is a move in that political policy that has in every age only brought defeat and failure. He sees that Jerusalem, being the religious capital, his people will naturally go there to the temple for worship and the observance of the feasts they have been taught to keep since the time of Moses, and thus become attached to the Southern Kingdom.

He established two new religious capitals, one at Bethel in the south and the other at Dan in the north, places at which he erects altars and begins a kind of hybrid worship more heathen than divine. The effect is to arouse the priests and Levites, and drive them to Judah, leaving him to his idolatrous and heathen worship. This was done for the purpose of saving his kingdom, but man-made religions and state churches have in every age failed.

*The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets. "But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the Lord their God. (2 Kings 17:13-14)*

God's three divine orders in the Old Testament theocracy were prophets, priests and kings. The priests were often corrupt, and the kings, as a rule, were bad. Only three of Judah's rulers after Solomon wholly walked in the ways of David, and all the kings of Israel were corrupt. It seemed a punishment upon the nation for asking for a king, instead of accepting Jehovah as their true and only Sovereign.

The prophets were a royal line of faithful witnesses for God, from the day of Moses, who was the first great prophet, through Samuel, who organized the schools of the prophets, and Nathan, who was a friend of David and not afraid to warn him boldly when he sinned, down to the later and darker times of Elijah and Elisha. They were the very bulwark of the nation, and a wicked king might well say of one of them: "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" (2 Kings 2:12).

Still later they became God's messengers to the far distant ages, and their writings have come down to us, beginning with Jonah and covering all the later centuries of the changeful history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

We will introduce this noble line by referring to the first two examples in the reign of Jeroboam. The first of these was Ahijah, and the second a nameless prophet, who came originally from Judah, but prophesied at Bethel, and afterwards perished for an act of thoughtless disobedience to the commandment of Jehovah.

This incident concerning the prophets of Bethel is strange and solemn. It is the story of a nameless prophet. His very identity has not come down to us. His life seems like one of those little black crosses that stand on some of the cliffs of the Alps, marking the spot where some reckless traveler fell into the abyss below. Just a little black cross with no name upon it, but one solemn word written with mystic fingers, and speaking to us from its weird and warning front, "Beware! Beware!"

The story is a thrilling one. When Jeroboam was establishing his false calf worship at the shrine of Bethel, suddenly there appeared before the altar at which the king was officiating, a prophet from Judah, stern and silent. He was robed in the weird garments of his calling. The prophet publicly announced that the day would come when a king named Josiah should burn upon that altar the bones of the priests who had officiated before it. And in token of the truth of his words, he declared that the altar should be rent in the presence of the worshipers, and that the ashes should be sprinkled upon the ground. No sooner said than done, and, lo, as he stood, the altar was riven before the very face of the king and the ashes scattered at his feet. Instinctively Jeroboam reached out his hand either to strike or stop the old prophet, but the hand was stricken with paralysis and he was unable even to recall it to his side. Then his proud heart yielded, and he cried for mercy, and in answer to the prophet's prayer his withered hand was healed.

He now invited the prophet to come to his palace and accept of his hospitality, but the old man had been warned to enter no household in all that wicked land, but to return in silence as he had come. On his way, however, he was waylaid by another prophet who was desirous, either from vanity or some unworthy motive, to entertain him. When the old man refused as he had refused Jeroboam, the other told him that he, too, was a prophet, and had just received a message from an angel of the Lord bidding him come and meet the servant of God and take him home to his house. The old prophet was deceived, and believing his message, went with him. Before their evening meal was ended, the Spirit of God came upon the seducing prophet, and he was compelled to declare to his guest that because he had disobeyed the voice of the Lord, he should never return to his home, but should perish through the judgment of God. The next morning he saddled his ass and stole homeward, but a lion met him in the way. After having slain the prophet, the lion stood guard over his body, touching neither his corpse nor the ass that had borne him, but standing there in silence like an angel of God, and certainly God's messenger of judgment.

When tidings came of this terrible tragedy, the prophet that had deceived him hastened to take the remains and bury them, in his own sepulchre. Then he left as his last order with his family, that when he should die they should bury him in the grave of the prophet whom he had deceived and wronged and whom, too late, he found himself unable to save. We are not told of the bitter tears he shed, of the vain remorse, of the sorrow, of the shadow that settled upon his own life and the awful sense of his having become the murderer of one of Jehovah's servants, when he had perhaps, lightly thought that he was only doing him a hospitable kindness. And so the lesson has come down to us, and surely its point is not difficult to trace and its application is just as vital today as in the days of Jeroboam.

Surely, its one message is that which God gave long ago to Joshua as the key to Canaan, "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7). Implicit obedience! Surely, this is the mystic message that blazes from that little black cross yonder on the heights of Bethel.

Yes, we may be utterly sincere, we may not mean to disobey, we may be honestly deceived, but it does not save that ship from wreck to have mistaken the light or allowed its compass to be turned aside by some other attraction. There will be inevitable retribution both in the natural and moral world, and God has said "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7).

There was much that was good and glorious in the prophet of Bethel. He had been fearless and faithful in executing the divine commission against Jeroboam and his altar. He had been firm in refusing the hospitality of the king, and in this he was eminently wise, for it is vain to expect the worldly to listen to our warnings when we sit down with it at its entertainments and enter into partnership with it in its unholy gains. Especially must the ministry of God keep itself unspotted from the world and stand uncompromised with evil in every way. And he had been most godlike in his mercy in healing the penitent king and rightly representing the goodness, as well as the severity of God.

All this was good and godlike. But all this could not excuse his weakness and incautiousness in listening to the voice of the seducer. True again, the deceiver was a prophet, but prophets may deceive, and we have no business to listen to even the most wise and eloquent words of ministers and messengers of God, unless they are according to the Word of God. It is the pulpits of our land today that are most perilously deceiving the flock of God, and no human authority or influence should have the slightest weight with us unless we find back of it in our Bibles a "thus saith the LORD." No, even though we may be told as he was, that an angel from heaven has sent the message, even Paul has told us that "even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (1:8).

No vision, no revelation, can have any weight against the Word which God has already given to us, and by which all truth must be judged and all destiny decided. The deception was perhaps, kindly meant, but it is by mistaken kindness still that souls are often misled and forever lost. Your polite invitation to some worldly entertainment, your well-meant introduction to some ungodly friend may be the turning point for ruin in the life of someone that you love, and may yet fill your own heart with deepest sorrow.

Surely behind the picture of that prophet of Bethel and his seducer there is a vision which we may be pardoned for imagining. Could you have seen that broken-hearted man as he hastened to pick up the corpse of his late guest? Could you have seen him, fearless of the lion that stood growling beside it, as he gathered it up tenderly in his arms and bore it to his own burying place? Could you have heard his bitter lamentations as he cursed his own mistaken kindness? Could you have seen his overshadowed life as he went down to the grave, with but one thought, to lay his bones beside those of the man he had ruined, you would, doubtless, have seen a picture that in no way exaggerated this description. And yet such a sorrow awaits every soul that in any way allows itself to become instrumental in the ruin of another's life.

It may seem a trifling matter to lead a pure young life aside from the paths of innocence. But, oh some day when you come face to face—as you will—with the fruits of your life, when you see the anguish, the despair, the terrible ruin which you have wrought, dear friend, it will be a worse hell than your own. Oh, man of selfish and unholy pleasure, it may seem very amusing for a time to dally with temptation and lead some innocent and trusting life to take the first step in the downward course; but go down to the morgue and look upon that pale young face so cold in death. Look at the oozing froth from that mouth, and think of the anguish with which she hurled her desperate life into the oblivion she sought in vain.



Over the brink of it,  
Picture it, think of it,  
Dissolute man:  
Lave in it, drink of it then if you can.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

### **How do you account for Rehoboam's poor judgment of taking the advice of the young men rather than that of the elders (1 Kings 12:6-14)**

1 Kings 12:15

Twice over we are told that *it was a tiling brought about by God*,—vs. 15, 24. Beneath all political changes and revolutions you will find the slow evolving of a divine purpose. God does not instigate sin. This arises from man's abuse of his own free-will. But God will so control the warring wills of men that the plan of his eternal counsel and foreknowledge shall not be interfered with but furthered. (F. B. Meyer) **How was the civil war in the kingdom averted?**

1 Kings 12:24

Jeroboam knew better than to make these two calves. The prophet had clearly told him that the stability of his throne was contingent upon his obedience, 1:38. It was definitely promised that if he would hearken to do all that was commanded him, God would be with him and build him a sure house. But he was not content with this.

Fearing that if his people went up to the annual feasts at Jerusalem, they would return to their ancient loyalty to David's throne and kill him, Jeroboam set up the worship of Jehovah under the semblance of these two calves. He thus broke not the First but the Second Commandment, and sowed seeds from which his descendants were destined to reap a succession of bitter harvests. He was like the foolish man of our Lord's parable, who heard and did not; and whose house, however carefully it might have been constructed, was sapped by the rising waters. Expediency always deceives those who turn from God and rely on the devices of their own hearts. It seems that Jeroboam constituted himself priest as well as king. There is no knowing to what lengths men may drift, when they lose their moorings in God. (F. B. Meyer)

### **What is the source of motivation of the enemies of Jeroboam and Rehoboam?**

1 Kings 14:14-16

### **1 Kings 15:1-16:34**

Elijah appeared on the stage of public action during one of the darkest hours of Israel's sad history. He is introduced to us at the beginning of 1 Kings 17, and we have but to read through the previous chapters to discover what a deplorable state God's people were then in. Israel had grievously and flagrantly departed from Jehovah, and that which directly opposed Him had been publicly set up. Never before had the favored nation sunk so low. Fifty-eight years had passed since the kingdom had been rent in twain following the death of Solomon. During that brief period no less than seven kings had reigned over the ten tribes, and all of them without exception were wicked men. Painful indeed is it to trace their sad course, and still more tragic to behold how there has been a repetition of the same in the history of Christendom.

The first of those seven kings was Jeroboam.

Of the next king, Nadab, it is said, "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin," (1 Kings 15:26). He was succeeded on the throne by the very man who murdered him, Baasha, (1 Kings 15:27). Next came Elah, a drunkard, who in turn was a murderer, (1 Kings 16:8, 9). His successor, Zimri, was guilty of "treason," (1 Kings 16:20). He was followed by a military adventurer of the name of Omri, and of him we are told, "but Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities," (1 Kings 16:25, 26). The evil cycle was completed by Omri's son, for he was even more vile than those who had preceded him.

"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him," (1 Kings 16:30, 31). This marriage of Ahab to a heathen princess was, as might fully be expected (for we cannot trample God's Law beneath our feet with impunity), fraught with the most frightful consequences. In a short time all trace of the pure worship of Jehovah vanished from the land and gross idolatry became rampant. The golden calves were worshipped at Dan and Bethel, a temple had been erected to Baal in Samaria, the "groves" of Baal appeared on every side, and the priests of Baal took full charge of the religious life of Israel.

It was openly declared that Baal lived and that Jehovah ceased to be. What a shocking state of things had come to pass is clear from, "And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him," (1 Kings 16:33). Defiance of the Lord God and blatant wickedness had now reached

their culminating point. This is made still further evident by, "In his days did Hiel of Bethel build Jericho," (v. 34). Awful effrontery was this, for of old it had been recorded, "Joshua charged *them* at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho: he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates." (Josh. 6:26). The rebuilding of the accursed Jericho was open defiance of God.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**List the kings of Israel and Judah in chronological order giving a short characterization of their reign and include the prophets and prophecies during their reign.**

### **1 Kings 17:1**

Now it was in the midst of this spiritual darkness and degradation that there appeared on the stage of public action, with dramatic suddenness, a solitary but striking witness to and for the living God. An eminent commentator began his remarks upon 1 Kings 17 by saying, "The most illustrious prophet Elijah was raised up in the reign of the most wicked of the kings of Israel." That is a terse but accurate summing up of the situation in Israel at that time: not only so, but it supplies the key to all that follows. It is truly saddening to contemplate the awful conditions which then prevailed. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of divine testimony was hushed. Spiritual death was spread over everything, and it looked as though Satan had indeed obtained mastery of the situation.

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word," (1 Kings 17:1). God, with a high hand, now raised up a powerful witness for Himself. Elijah is here brought to our notice in a most abrupt manner. Nothing is recorded of his parentage or previous manner of life. We do not even know to which tribe he belonged, though the fact that he was "of the inhabitants of Gilead" makes it likely that he pertained either to Gad or Manasseh, for Gilead was divided between them. "Gilead lay east of the Jordan: it was wild and rugged; its hills were covered with shaggy forests; its awful solitudes were only broken by the dash of mountain streams; its valleys were the haunt of fierce wild beasts."

As we have pointed out above, Elijah is introduced to us in the divine narrative in a strange manner, without anything being told us of his ancestry or early life. We believe there is a *typical reason* why the spirit made no reference to Elijah's origin. Like Melchizedek, the beginning and close of his history is shrouded in sacred mystery. As the absence of any mention of Melchizedek's birth and death was divinely designed to foreshadow the eternal priesthood and kingship of Christ, so the fact that we know nothing of Elijah's father and mother, and the further fact that he was supernaturally translated from this world without passing through the portals of death, mark him as the typical forerunner of the everlasting Prophet. Thus the omission of such details adumbrated the *endlessness* of Christ's *prophetic* office.

The fact that we are told Elijah "was of the inhabitants of Gilead" is no doubt recorded as a sidelight upon his natural training—one which ever exerts a powerful influence on the forming of character. The people of those hills reflected the nature of their environment: they were rough and rugged, solemn and stern, dwelling in rude villages and subsisting by keeping flocks of sheep. Hardened by an open-air life, dressed in a cloak of camel's hair, accustomed to spending most of his time in solitude, possessed of sinewy (lean and tough) strength which enabled him to endure great physical strain, Elijah would present a marked contrast with the town dwellers in the lowland valleys, and more especially would he be distinguished from the pampered courtiers of the palace.

What age he was when the Lord first granted Elijah a personal and saving revelation of Himself we have no means of knowing, as we have no information about his early religious training. But there is one sentence in a later chapter which enables us to form a definite idea of the spiritual caliber of the man—"I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts," (1 Kings 19:10). Those words cannot mean less than that he had God's glory greatly at heart and that the honor of *His* name meant more to him than anything else. Consequently, he must have been deeply grieved and filled with holy indignation as he became more and more informed about the terrible character and wide extent of Israel's defection from Jehovah.

There can be little room for doubt that Elijah must have been thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures, especially the first books of the Old Testament. Knowing how much the Lord had done for Israel, the signal favors. He had bestowed upon them, he must have yearned with deep desire that they should please and glorify Him. But when he learned that this was utterly lacking, and as tidings reached him of what was happening on the other side of the Jordan, as he became informed of how Jezebel had thrown down God's altars, slain His servants, and replaced them with the idolatrous priests of heathendom, his soul must have been filled with horror and his blood made to boil with indignation, for he was "very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." Would that more of such righteous indignation filled and fired us today!

Probably the question which now most deeply exercised Elijah was, How should he act? What could *he* do, a rude, uncultured, child of the desert? The more he pondered it, the more difficult the situation must have seemed; and no doubt Satan whispered in his ear, "You can do nothing, conditions are hopeless." But there was one thing he could do: betake himself to that grand resource of all deeply tried souls—he could *pray*. And he did: as James 5:17 tells us, "he prayed earnestly." He prayed because he was assured that the Lord God lived and ruled over all. He prayed because he

realized that God is almighty and that with Him all things are possible. He prayed because he felt his own weakness and insufficiency and therefore turned to One who is clothed with might and is infinitely self-sufficient.

But in order to be effectual, prayer must be grounded on the Word of God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him, and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," (Rom. 10:17): Now there was one particular passage in the earlier books of Scripture which seems to have been specially fixed on Elijah's attention: "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and He shut up the heaven, *that there be no rain*, and that the land yield not her fruit," (Deut. 11:16, 17): That was exactly the crime of which Israel was now guilty: they had turned aside to worship false gods. Suppose, then, that this divinely threatened judgment should not be executed, would it not indeed appear that Jehovah was but a myth, a dead tradition? And Elijah was "very jealous for the Lord God of hosts," and accordingly we are told that "he prayed earnestly that it might not rain," (Jas. 5:17): Thus we learn once more what true prayer is: it is faith laying hold of the Word of God, pleading it before him, and saying, "do as Thou hast said," (2 Sam. 7:25).

"He prayed earnestly that it might not rain." Do some of our readers exclaim, "What a terrible prayer"? Then we ask, Was it not far more terrible that the favored descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob should despise and turn away from the Lord God and blatantly insult Him by worshipping Baal? Would they desire the thrice-Holy One to wink at such enormities? Are His righteous laws to be trampled upon with impunity? Shall He refuse to enforce their just penalties? What conception would men form of the Divine character if He ignored their open defiance of Himself? Let Scripture answer: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," (Eccl. 8:11). Yes, and not only so, but as God declared, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes," (Ps. 50:21).

Ah, my reader, there is something far more dreadful than physical calamity and suffering, namely, moral delinquency and spiritual apostasy. Alas, that this is so rarely perceived today! What are crimes against man in comparison with high-handed sins against God? Likewise what are national reverses in comparison with the loss of God's favor? The fact is that Elijah had a true sense of values: he was "very jealous for the Lord God of hosts," and therefore he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. Desperate diseases call for drastic measures. And as he prayed, Elijah obtained assurance that his petition was granted, and that he must go and acquaint Ahab. Whatever danger the prophet might personally incur, both the king and his subject should learn the direct connection between the terrible drought and their sins which had occasioned it.

The task which now confronted Elijah was no ordinary one, and it called for more than common courage. For an untutored rustic of the hills to appear uninvited before a king who defied heaven was sufficient to quell the bravest; the more so when his heathen consort shrank not from slaying any who opposed her will, in fact who had already put many of God's servants to death. What likelihood, then, was there of this lonely Gileadite escaping with his life? "But the righteous are bold as a lion," (Prov. 28:1): they who are right with God are neither daunted by difficulties nor dismayed by dangers. "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about," (Ps. 3:6); "Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear," (Ps. 27:3): such is the blessed serenity of those whose conscience is void of offence and whose trust is in the living God.

The hour for the execution of his stern task had arrived, and Elijah leaves his home in Gilead to deliver unto Ahab his message of judgment. Picture him on his long and lonely journey. What were the subjects which engaged his mind? Would he be reminded of the similar mission on which Moses had embarked, when he was sent by the Lord to deliver his ultimatum to the haughty monarch of Egypt? Well, the message which he bore would be no more palatable to the degenerate king of Israel. Yet such a recollection need in nowise deter or intimidate him: rather should the remembrance of the sequel strengthen his faith. The Lord God had not failed his servant Moses, but had stretched forth His mighty arm on his behalf, and in the end had given him full success. The wondrous works of God in the past should ever hearten His servants and saints in the present.

Elijah was now called upon to deliver a most unpalatable message unto the most powerful man in all Israel, but conscious that God was with him he flinched not from such a task. Suddenly confronting Ahab, Elijah at once made it evident that he was faced by one who had no fear of him, king though he were. His first words informed Israel's degenerate monarch that he had to do with the living God. "As the Lord God of Israel liveth" was an outspoken confession of the prophet's faith, as it also directed attention to the One whom Ahab had forsaken. "Before whom I stand": (that is, whose servant I am—cf. Deut. 10:8; Luke 1:19) in whose Name I approach you, in whose veracity and power I unquestioningly rely, in whose ineffable presence I am now conscious of standing, and to whom I have prayed and obtained answer.

"There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Frightful prospect was that! From the expression "the early and the latter rain" (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24), we gather that, normally, Palestine experienced a dry season of several months' duration: but though no rain fell then, heavy dews descended at night which greatly refreshed vegetation. But for neither dew nor rain to fall, and that for a period of years, was a terrible judgment indeed. That land so rich and fertile as to be designated one which "flowed with milk and honey," would quickly be turned into one of drought and barrenness, entailing famine, pestilence and death. And when God withholds rain, none can create it. "Are there any

among the vanities (false gods) of the Gentiles that can cause rain?" (Jer. 14:22)—how *that* reveals the utter impotency of idols, and the madness of those who render them homage!

The exacting ordeal facing Elijah in confronting Ahab and delivering such a message called for no ordinary moral strength. This will be the more evident if we direct attention to a detail which seems to have quite escaped the commentators, one which is only apparent by a careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture. Elijah told the king, "there shall be no dew nor rain these years," while in 1 Kings 18:1 the sequel says, "And it come to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 18:1). On the other hand, Christ declared "many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias (Elijah), when the heaven was shut up three years *and six months*, when great famine was throughout all the land" (Luke 4:25). How, then, are we to explain those extra six months? In this way: there had *already been* a six months' drought when Elijah visited Ahab: we can well imagine how furious the king would be when told that the terrible drought was to last another three years!

Yes, the unpleasant task before Elijah called for no ordinary resolution and boldness, and well may we inquire, What was the secret of his remarkable courage, how are we to account for his strength? Some of the Jewish rabbis have contended that he was an angel, but that cannot be, for the New Testament expressly informs us that he was "a man subject to like passions as we are" (Jas. 5:17). Yes, he was but "a man," nevertheless he trembled not in the presence of a monarch. Though a man, yet he had power to close heaven's windows and dry up earth's streams. But the question returns upon us, How are we to account for the full assurance with which he foretold the protracted drought, his confidence that all would be according to his word? How was it that one so weak in himself became mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds?

We suggest a threefold reason as to the secret of Elijah's strength. First, *his praying*. "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (Jas. 5:17). Let it be duly noted that the prophet did not begin his fervent supplications *after* his appearance before Ahab, but six months before! Here, then, lies the explanation of his assurance and boldness before the king. Prayer in private was the source of his power in public: he could stand unabashed in the presence of the wicked monarch because he had knelt in humility before God. But let it also be carefully observed that the prophet had "prayed earnestly": no formal and spiritless devotion that accomplished nothing was his, but whole-hearted, fervent and effectual.

Second, *his knowledge of God*. This is clearly intimated in his words to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth." Jehovah was to him a living reality. On all sides the open recognition of God had ceased: so far as outward appearances went there was not a soul in Israel who believed in His existence. But Elijah was not swayed by public opinion and practice. Why should he be, when he had within his own breast an experience which enabled him to say with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" The infidelity and atheism of others cannot shake the faith of one who has apprehended God for himself. It is this which explains Elijah's courage, as it did on a later occasion the uncompromising faithfulness of Daniel and his three fellow Hebrews. He who really knows God is strong (Dan. 11:32), and fears not man.

Third, *his consciousness of the Divine presence*: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand." Elijah was not only assured of the reality of Jehovah's existence, but he was conscious of being in His presence. Though appearing before the person of Ahab, the prophet knew he was in the presence of One infinitely greater than any earthly monarch, even Him before whom the highest angels bow in adoring worship. Gabriel himself could not make a grander avowal (Luke 1:19). Ah, my reader, such a blessed assurance as this lifts us above all fear. If the Almighty was with him, why should the prophet tremble before a worm of the earth! The Lord God of Israel liveth: "before whom I stand" clearly reveals the foundation on which his soul rested as he executed his unpleasant task.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

### **Tell something of the character of Elijah.**

1 Kings 19:9-10    Jam. 5:17

### **1 Kings 17:2-7**

"And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan" (1 Kings 17:2, 3). As pointed out in our last chapter, it was not merely to provide Elijah with a safe retreat, to protect His servant from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel, that Jehovah so commanded the prophet, but to signify His sore displeasure against His apostate people: the withdrawal of the prophet from the scene of public action was an additional judgment on the nation. We cannot forbear pointing out that tragic analogy which now obtains more or less in Christendom. During the past two or three decades God has removed some eminent and faithful servants of His by the hand of death, and not only has He not replaced them by raising up others in their stead, but an increasing number of those who still remain are being sent into seclusion by Him.

It was both for God's glory and the prophet's own good that the Lord bade him "get thee hence . . . hide thyself." It was a call to separation. Ahab was an apostate, and his consort was a heathen. Idolatry abounded on every side. Jehovah was publicly dishonored. The man of God could have no sympathy or communion with such a horrible situation.

Isolation from evil is absolutely essential if we are to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1.27): not only separation from secular wickedness *but from religious corruption also*. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11), has been God's demand in every dispensation. Elijah stood as the Lord's faithful witness in a day of national departure from Himself, and having delivered His testimony to the responsible head, the prophet must now retire. To turn our backs on all that dishonors God is an essential duty.

It was also for the prophet's own personal good that the Lord now bade him "hide thyself." He was in danger from another quarter than the fury of Ahab. The success of his supplications might prove a snare, tending to fill his heart with pride, and even to harden him against the calamity then desolating the land. Previously he had been engaged in secret prayer, and then for a brief moment he had witnessed a good confession before the king. The future held for him yet more honorable service, for the day was to come when he should witness for God not only in the presence of Ahab, but he should discomfit and utterly rout the assembled hosts of Baal and, in measure at least, turn the wandering nation back again unto the God of their fathers. But the time for that was not ripe; neither was Elijah himself.

The prophet needed further training in secret if he was to be personally fitted to speak again for God in public. Ah, my reader, the man whom the Lord uses has to be kept low: severe discipline has to be experienced by him, if the flesh is to be duly mortified. Three more years must be spent by the prophet in seclusion. How humbling! Alas, how little is man to be trusted: how little is he able to bear being put into the place of honor! How quickly self rises to the surface, and the instrument is ready to believe he is something more than an instrument! How sadly easy it is to make of the very service God entrusts us with a pedestal on which to display ourselves. But God will not share His glory with another, and therefore does He "hide" those who may be tempted to take some of it unto themselves. It is only by retiring from public view and getting alone with God that we can learn our own nothingness.

We see this important lesson brought out plainly in Christ's dealings with His beloved apostles. On one occasion they returned to Him flushed with success and full of themselves: they "told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught" (Mark 6:30). Most instructive is His quiet response: "And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while" (v. 31). This is still His gracious remedy for any of His servants who may be puffed up with their own importance, and imagine that His cause upon earth would suffer a severe loss if *they* were removed from it. God often says to His servants, 'Get thee hence . . . hide thyself': sometimes it is by the dashing of their ministerial hopes, sometimes by a bed of affliction or by a severe bereavement, the divine purpose is accomplished. Happy the one who can then say from his heart, "The will of the Lord be done."

Every servant that God deigns (deems worthy) to use must pass through the trying experience of Cherith before he is ready for the triumph of Carmel. This is an unchanging principal in the ways of God. Joseph suffered the indignities of both the pit and the prison before he became governor of all Egypt, second only to the king himself. Moses spent one third of this long life at "the backside of the desert" before Jehovah gave him the honor of leading His people out of the house of bondage. David had to learn the sufficiency of God's power on the farm before he went forth and slew Goliath in the sight of the assembled armies of Israel and the Philistines. Thus it was, too, with the perfect Servant: thirty years of seclusion and silence before He began His brief public ministry. So too with the chief of His ambassadors: a season in the solitudes of Arabia was his apprenticeship before he became the apostle to the Gentiles.

But is there not yet another angle from which we may contemplate this seemingly strange order, 'Get thee hence . . . hide thyself'? Was it not a very real and severe testing of the prophet's submissiveness unto the Divine will? "Severe" we say, for to a robust man this request was much more exacting than his appearing before Ahab: one with a zealous disposition would find it much harder to spend three years in inactive seclusion than to be engaged in public service. The present writer can testify from long and painful experience that to be removed "into a corner" (Isa. 30:20), is a much severer trial than to address large congregations every night month after month. In the case of Elijah this lesson is obvious: he must learn personally to render implicit obedience unto the Lord before he was qualified to command others in His name.

Let us now take a closer look at the particular *place* selected by God as the one where His servant was next to sojourn: "by the brook Cherith." Ah, it was a brook and not a river—a brook which might dry up any moment. It is rare that God places His servants, or even His people, in the midst of luxury and abundance: to be surfeited (overindulged) with the things of this world only too often means the drawing away of the affections from the giver Himself. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" It is our *hearts* God requires, and often this is put to the proof. The way in which temporal losses are borne generally makes manifest the difference between the real Christian and the worldling. The latter is utterly cast down by financial reverses, and frequently commits suicide. Why? Because his all has gone and there is nothing left to live for. In contrast, the genuine believer may be severely shaken and for a time deeply depressed, but he will recover his poise and say, "God is still my portion and I shall not want."

Instead of a river, God often gives us a brook, which may be running today and dried up tomorrow. Why? To teach us not to rest in our blessings, but in the blessing Himself. Yet is it not at this very point that we so often fail—our hearts being far more occupied with the gifts than with the giver. Is not this just the reason why the Lord will not trust us with a river?—because it would unconsciously take His place in our hearts. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; *then* he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deut. 32:15). And the same evil tendency exists within *us*. We sometimes feel that we are being hardly

dealt with because God gives us a brook rather than a river, but his is because we are so little acquainted with our own hearts. God loves His own too well to place dangerous knives in the hands of infants.

And how was the prophet to subsist in such a place? Where was his food to come from? Ah, God will see to that: He will provide for his maintenance: "And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook" (v. 4). Whatever may be the case with Ahab and his idolators, Elijah shall not perish. In the very worst of times God will show Himself strong on the behalf of his own. Whoever starves they shall be fed: "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure" (Isa. 33:16). Yet how absurd it sounds to common sense to bid a man tarry indefinitely by a brook! Yes, but it was *God* who had given this order, and the divine commands are not to be argued about but obeyed. Thereby Elijah was bidden to trust God contrary to sight, to reason, to all outward appearances, to rest in the Lord Himself and wait patiently for Him.

"I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there*" (v. 4). Observe the word we have placed in italics. The prophet might have preferred many another hiding-place, but to Cherith he must go if he was to receive the Divine supplies: as long as he tarried there, God was pledged to provide for him. How important, then, is the question, Am I in the place which God has (by His Word or providence) assigned me? If so, He will assuredly supply my every need. But if like the younger son I turn my back upon Him and journey into the far country, then like that prodigal I shall certainly suffer want. How many a servant of God has labored in some lowly or difficult sphere with the dew of the Spirit on his soul and the blessing of Heaven on his ministry, when there came an invitation from some other field which seemed to offer a wider scope (and a larger salary!), and as he yielded to the temptation, the Spirit was grieved and his usefulness in God's kingdom was at an end.

"And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land" (v. 7). Weigh attentively these five words: "And it came to pass." They mean far more than that it merely happened: they signify that the Divine decree concerning the same was now fulfilled. "It came to pass" in the good providence of God, who orders all things after the counsel of His own will, and without whose personal permission nothing occurs, not even the falling of a sparrow to the ground (Matthew 10:29). How this should comfort the children of God and assure them of their security. There is no such thing as chance with reference to God—wherever this term occurs in the Bible it is always in connection with man, referring to something taking place without his design. Everything which occurs in this world is just as God ordained from the beginning (Acts 2:23). Endeavour to recall that fact, dear reader, the next time you are in difficulty and distress. If you are one of God's people He has provided for every contingency in His "Everlasting covenant" and His mercies are "*sure*" (2 Sam. 23:5; Isa. 55:3).

"That the brook dried up." Cherith would not flow forever, no, not even for the prophet. Elijah himself must be made to feel the awfulness of that calamity which he had announced. Ah, my reader, it is no uncommon thing for God to suffer His own dear children to become enwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. True, He makes a real difference both in the use and the issue of their stripes, but not so in the infliction of them. We are living in a world which is under the curse of a Holy God, and therefore "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Nor is there any escape from trouble so long as we are left in this scene. God's own people, though the objects of the everlasting love, are not exempted, for "many are the afflictions of the righteous." Why? For various reasons and with various designs: one of them being to wean our hearts from things below and cause us to set our affection on things above.

"The brook dried up." To outward appearance that would have seemed a real misfortune, to carnal reason and actual calamity. Let us endeavor to visualize Elijah there at Cherith. The drought was everywhere, the famine throughout the whole land: and now his own brook began to dry up. Day by day its waters gradually lessened unto soon there was barely a trickle, and then it entirely ceased. Had he grown increasingly anxious and gloomy? Did he say, What shall I do? Must I stay here and perish? Has God forgotten me? Did I take a wrong step, and after all, in coming here? It all depended upon how steadily his *faith* remained in exercise. If faith was active, then he admired the goodness of God in causing that supply of water to last so long. How much better for our souls, if instead of mourning over our losses, we praise God for continuing His mercies to us so long—especially when we bear in mind they are only *lent* to us, and that we deserve not the least of them.

Though dwelling in the place of God's appointing, yet Elijah is not exempted from those deep exercises of soul which are ever the necessary discipline of a life of faith. True, the ravens had, in obedience to the divine command, paid him their daily visits, supplying him with food morning and evening, and the brook had flowed on its tranquil course. But faith must be tested—and developed. The servant of God must not settle down on his lees, but pass from form to form in the school of the Lord; and having learned (through grace) the difficult lessons of one, he must now go forward to grapple with others yet more difficult. Perhaps the reader may now be facing the drying brook of popularity, of failing health, of diminishing business, of decreasing friendships. Ah, a drying brook is a real trouble.

Why does God suffer the brook to dry up? To teach us to trust in Himself, and not in His gifts. As a general rule He does not for long provide for His people in the same way and by the same means, lest they should rest in *them* and expect help from them. Sooner or later God shows us how dependent we are upon *Himself* even for supplies of every-day mercies. But the heart of the prophet must be tested, to show whether his trust was in Cherith or in the living God. So it is in His dealings with us. How often we *think* we are trusting in the Lord, when really we are resting on comfortable circumstances; and when they become uncomfortable, how much faith have we?

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

The powers of nature are limited but not the power of the God of nature. Elijah's brook dried up (v. 7) because there was no rain. **What are some of the brooks that dry up in your life and are these just new trials of your faith?**

Jam. 1:2-4

## **1 Kings 17:8-16**

The Lord had ordered him, "hide thyself by the brook Cherith," adding, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there*"; and it is striking and blessed to see that he *remained* there even after his supply of water had ceased. The prophet did not move his quarters until he received definite instruction from the Lord to do so. It was thus with Israel of old in the wilderness, as they journeyed to the promised land: "At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and *journeyed not*. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the Lord they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the Lord they journeyed. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night . . . two days, or a month, *or a year* . . . the children of Israel abode in their tents and journeyed not" (Num. 9:18-22). And that is expressly recorded for our instruction and comfort, and it is both our wisdom and welfare to heed the same.

"And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath," (1 Kings 17:8, 9). Did not this show plainly how worthless and needless was any carnal scheming on the part of the prophet, had he indulged in such? God had not "forgotten to be gracious," nor would He leave His servant without the needed direction or guidance when His time had arrived to grant the same. How loudly ought this to speak unto our hearts—we who are far too full of our *own* plans and devisings. Instead of heeding that injunction, "My soul, wait thou only upon God," we contrive some way of getting out of our difficulties and then ask the Lord to prosper the same. If a Samuel does not arrive just when we expect, then we try to force things (1 Sam. 13:12).

Let us be duly noted, however, that before God's word came afresh to Elijah both his faith and his patience had been put to the proof. In going to Cherith the prophet had acted under divine orders, and therefore was he under God's special care. Could he then come to any real harm under such guardianship? He must therefore remain where he is until God directs him to leave the place, no matter how unpleasant conditions may become. So with us. When it is clear that God has placed us where we are, there we must, "Abide," (1 Cor. 7:20), even though our continuance in it be attended with hardships and apparent hazard. If, on the other hand Elijah had left Cherith of his own accord, how could he count upon the Lord being with him both to provide for his wants and to deliver him from his enemies? The same applies to us with equal force today.

"And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there" (vv. 8, 9). This meant that Elijah must be disciplined by still further trials and humblings. First of all, the name of the place to which God ordered His servant to go is deeply suggestive, for "Zarephath" means "refining," coming from a root that signifies a crucible—the place where metals are melted. There lay before Elijah not only a further testing of this faith, but also the *refining* of it, for a "crucible" is for the purpose of separating dross from the fine gold. The experience which now confronted our prophet was a very trying and distasteful one to flesh and blood, for to go from Cherith to Zarephath involved a journey of seventy-five miles across the desert. Ah, the place of refining is not easily reached and involves that from which all of us naturally shrink.

It is also to be carefully noted that Zarephath was "in Zidon": that is to say, it was in the territory of the Gentiles, outside the land of Palestine. Our Lord threw emphasis on this detail (in His first recorded public address) as being one of the earliest intimations of the favors which God purposed to extend unto the Gentiles, saying, "there were many widows in Israel" at that time (Luke 4:25, 26), who might (or might not) have gladly sheltered and succored the prophet; but unto none of them was he sent—what a severe reflection on the chosen nation, to pass them by! But what is yet more remarkable is the fact the "Zidon" was the very place from which Jezebel, the wicked corrupter of Israel, had come (1 Kings 16:31)! How passing strange are the ways of God, yet ever ordered by infinite wisdom! As Matthew Henry says, "To show Jezebel the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for His servant even in her country."

Equally striking is it to observe the particular person whom God selected to entertain Elijah. It was not a rich merchant or one of the chief men of Zidon, but a poor widow—desolate and dependent—who was made both willing and able to minister unto him. It is usually God's way, and to His glory, to make use of and place honor upon "the weak and foolish things of the world." In commenting upon the "ravens" which brought bread and flesh to the prophet while he sojourned by the brook, we called attention to the sovereignty of God and the strangeness of the instruments He is pleased to employ. The same truth is vividly illustrated here: a poor widow! A Gentile! Dwelling in Zidon, the original home of Jezebel! Think it not strange then, my reader, if God's dealings with you have been the very opposite of what you had expected. The Lord is a law to Himself, and implicit trust and unreserved submission is what He requires from us.

"Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee" (v. 9). Man's extremity is God's opportunity: when Cherith is dried up then shall Zarephath be opened. How this should teach us to refrain from anxious care about the future. Remember, dear reader, that tomorrow will bring with it tomorrow's God. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. 41:10): make these sure and certain promises—for they are the Word of Him that cannot lie—the stay of your soul; make them your reply to every question of unbelief and every foul aspersion of the devil. Observe that once more God sent Elijah not to a river but a "brook" —not to some wealthy person with great resources, but to a poor widow with scanty means. Ah, the Lord would have His servant remain a pensioner upon Himself and as much dependent on His power and goodness as before.

This was indeed a severe testing of Elijah, not only to take a long journey through the desert but to enter into an experience which was entirely opposed to his natural feelings, his religious training and spiritual inclinations—to be made dependent upon a Gentile in a heathen city. He was required to leave the land of his fathers and sojourn at the headquarters of Baal-worship. Let us duly weigh this truth that God's plan for Elijah demanded from him unquestioning *obedience*. They who would walk with God must not only trust Him implicitly but be prepared to be entirely regulated by His Word. Not only must our faith be trained by a great variety of providences, but our obedience by the Divine commandments. Vain is it to suppose that we can enjoy the smile of Jehovah unless we be in subjection to His precepts. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). Directly we become disobedient our communion with God is broken and chastisement becomes our portion.

"So he arose and went to Zarephath" (v. 10). In this Elijah gave proof that he was indeed the servant of God, for the path of a *servant* is the path of obedience: let him forsake that path and he ceases to be a servant. The servant and obedience are as inseparably linked together as the workman and work. Many today talk about their service *for* Christ, as though He needed their assistance, as though His cause would not prosper unless they patronized and furthered it—as though the holy ark must inevitably fall to the ground unless their unholy hands uphold it. This is all wrong, seriously wrong—the product of Satan-fed pride. What is so much needed (by us!) is service to Christ, submission to His yoke, surrender to His will, subjection to His commandments. Any "Christian service" other than walking in His precepts is a human invention, fleshly energy, "strange fire."

Let it be duly noted that the Lord gave Elijah no more information as to his future residence and maintenance than that it was to be at Zarephath and by a widow. In a time of famine we should be profoundly thankful that the Lord provides for us at all, and be quite content to leave the mode of doing so with Him. If the Lord undertakes to guide us in our life's journey, we must be satisfied with His doing it step by step. It is rarely His way to reveal to us much beforehand. In most cases we know little or nothing in advance. How can it be otherwise if we are to walk by *faith*! We must trust Him implicitly for the full development of His plan concerning us. But if we are really walking with God, taking heed to our ways according to His Word, He will gradually make things plain. His providences will clear up our difficulties, and what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Thus it was with Elijah.

"So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks" (v. 10). She was so poor that she was without any fuel, or any servant to go and obtain a few sticks for her. What encouragement could Elijah derive from appearances? None whatever: instead, there was everything which was calculated to fill him with doubts and fears if he was occupied with outward circumstances. "And he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die" (vv. 10-12): that was what confronted the prophet when he arrived at his divinely appointed destination! Put yourself in his place, dear reader, and would you not have felt that such a prospect was a gloomy and disquieting one?

But Elijah "conferred not with flesh and blood," and therefore he was not discouraged by what looked so unpromising a situation. Instead, his heart was sustained by the immutable Word of Him that cannot lie. Elijah's confidence rested not in favorable circumstances or "a goodly outlook," but in the faithfulness of the living God; and therefore his faith needed no assistance from the things around him. Appearances might be dark and dismal, but the eye of faith could pierce the black clouds and see above them the smiling countenance of his provider. Elijah's God was the Almighty, with whom all things are possible. "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee": *that* was what his heart was resting on. What is *yours* resting on? Are you being kept in peace in this ever-changing scene? Have you made one of His sure promises your own? "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou *shalt* be fed" (Ps. 37:3). "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed" (Ps. 46:1, 2).

"And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die," (v. 12). To natural sight, to human reason, it seemed impossible that she could sustain anyone. In abject poverty, the end of her provisions was now in sight. And her eyes were not on God (any more than ours are till the Spirit works within us!) but upon the barrel, and *it* was now failing her; consequently there was nothing before her mind except *death*. Unbelief and death are inseparably joined together. This widow's confidence lay in the barrel and the cruse, and beyond



them she saw no hope. As yet her soul knew nothing of the blessedness of communion with Him to whom alone belong the issues from death (Ps. 68:20). She was not yet able "against hope to believe in hope" (Rom. 4:18). Alas, what a poor tottering thing is that hope which rests on nothing better than a barrel of meal.

How prone we all are to lean on something just as paltry as a barrel of meal! And just so long as we do so our expectations can only be scanty and evanescent (fleeting). Yet, on the other hand, let us remember that the smallest measure of meal in the hand of God is to faith as sufficient and effectual as "the cattle upon a thousand hills." But alas, how rarely is faith in healthy exercise. Only too often we are like the disciples when, in the presence of the hungry multitude, they exclaimed, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are *they* among so many?" (John 6:9)—that is the language of unbelief, of carnal reason. Faith is not occupied with difficulties, but with Him with whom all things are possible. Faith is not occupied with circumstances, but with the God of circumstances. Thus it was with Elijah as we shall see when we contemplate the immediate sequel.

And what a test of Elijah's faith was now supplied by those doleful words of the poor widow. Consider the situation which now confronted his eyes. A widow and her son starving: a few sticks, a handful of meal, and a little oil between them and death. Nevertheless God had said to him, 'I have commanded a widow woman there to *sustain thee*.' How many would exclaim, How deeply mysterious, what a trying experience for the prophet! Why, he needed to help her rather than become a burden upon her. Ah, but like Abraham before him, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith." He knew that the Possessor of heaven and earth had decreed she *should* sustain him, and even though there had been no meal or oil at all, that had in no wise dampened his spirits or deterred him. O my reader, if you know anything experimentally of the goodness, the power and faithfulness of God, let your confidence in Him remain unshaken, no matter what appearances may be.

Instead of being amply furnished to minister unto Elijah, she tells him that "a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse" was all she had left. What a testing of faith! How unreasonable it seemed that the man of God should expect sustenance under *her* roof. No more unreasonable than that Noah should be required to build an ark before there was any rain, still less any signs of a flood; no more unreasonable than that Israel should be required simply to walk round and round the walls of Jericho. The path of obedience can only be trodden as faith is in exercise.

"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth" (v. 14). Ah, that made all the difference: that removed the sting from the request, showing there was no selfishness inspiring the same. She was asked for a portion of that little which she had remaining, but Elijah tells her she need not hesitate to bestow it, for although the case seemed desperate God would take care of her and of her son. Observe with what implicit confidence the prophet spoke: there was no uncertainty, but positive and unwavering assurance that their supply should not diminish. Ah, Elijah had learned a valuable lesson at Cherith—learned it experimentally: he had proved the faithfulness of Jehovah by the brook, and therefore was he now qualified to quiet the fears and comfort the heart of this poor widow—compare 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4, which reveals the secret of all effective ministry.

Observe the particular title here accorded Deity. The woman had said, "As the Lord thy God liveth" (v. 12), but this was not sufficient. Elijah declared, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel": this Gentile must be made to realize the humbling truth that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). "The Lord God of Israel": of whose wondrous works you must have heard so much: the One who made a footstool of the haughty Pharaoh, who brought His people through the Red Sea dry-shod, who miraculously sustained them for forty years in the wilderness, and who subdued the Canaanites for them. Such a One may surely be trusted for our daily bread. The "Lord God of Israel" is He whose promise never fails, for "the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent" or change His mind (1 Sam. 15:29). Such a One may be safely relied upon.

"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth" (v. 14). God gave her His word of promise to rest upon: could she rely upon it? Would she really trust Him? Note how definite was the promise: it was not barely, God will not suffer thee to starve, or will surely supply all your need; rather was it as though the prophet had said, The meal in *thy* barrel shall not diminish nor the oil in *thy* cruse dry up. And if *our* faith be a Divinely-sustained one it will cause us to trust in God's promise, to commit ourselves unreservedly to His care, and to do good unto our fellow-creatures. But observe how faith must *continue* in exercise: no new barrel of meal was promised or furnished: just an undiminished "handful"—seemingly an inadequate quantity for the family, but quite sufficient with God. "Until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth" evidenced the firm faith of the prophet himself.

"And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days" (v. 15). Who can forbear exclaiming, O woman, great is thy faith! She might have advanced many excuses to the prophet's request, especially as he was a stranger to her, but great as the test was, her faith in the Lord was equal to it. Her simple trust that God would take care of them overcame all the objections of carnal reason. Does she not remind us of another Gentile woman, the Syro-Phoenician, a descendant of the idolatrous Canaanites, who long afterwards welcomed the appearance of Christ to the borders of Tyre, and who sought His aid on behalf of her demon-distressed daughter? With astonishing faith she overcame every obstacle, and obtained a portion of the children's bread in the healing of her daughter (Matthew 15). Would that such cases moved us to cry from our hearts, "Lord, increase our faith," for none but He who bestows faith can increase it.

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." Certainly the widow had no cause to complain of the severe testing to which her faith had been put. God, who sent His prophet to board with her, paid well for his table—by providing her family with food while her neighbors were starving, and by granting her the company and instruction of His servant. Who can tell what blessing came to her soul under the edifying conversation of Elijah and from the efficacy of his prayers? She was of a humane and generous disposition, ready to relieve the misery of others and minister to the needs of God's servants; and her liberality was returned to her a hundredfold. Unto the merciful God shows mercy. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10).

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." Let us now endeavor to look higher, lest we miss the lovely type which is to be found here. The "meal" is certainly a divinely selected figure of Christ, the "corn of wheat" that died (John 12:24), being ground between the upper and nether millstones of Divine judgment that He might be unto us the "Bread of life." This is clear from the first few chapters of Leviticus, where we have the five great offerings appointed for Israel, which set forth the person and work of the Redeemer; the meal offering of "fine flour" (Lev. 2), portraying the perfections of His humanity. It is equally clear that the "oil" is an emblem of the Holy Spirit in His anointing, enlightening and sustaining operations. It is a most blessed line of study to trace through the Scriptures the typical references to the "oil".

As the little family of Zarephath was not sustained by meal or oil alone, but the two in conjunction, so the believer is not sustained spiritually without both Christ and the Holy Spirit. We could not feed upon Christ, yea, we would never feel our need of so doing, were it not for the gracious influence of the Spirit of God. The one is as indispensable to us as the other: Christ for us, the Spirit in us; The One maintaining our cause on high, the Other ministering to us down here.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**What does the word "Zarephath" mean and what significance was this for Elijah? Did Elijah have any idea what lay ahead? Why did God not just fill the woman's barrel with meal and oil but instead said to her through Elijah: "The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth"?**

### **1 Kings 17:17-24**

"Change and decay in all around I see." We live in a mutable world where nothing is stable, and where life is full of strange vicissitudes. We cannot, and we should not, expect things to go on smoothly for us for any length of time while we are sojourning in this land of sin and mortality. It would be contrary to the present constitution of our lot as fallen creatures, for "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward"; neither would it be for our good if we were altogether exempted from affliction. Though we be the children of God, the objects of His special favor, yet this does not free us from the ordinary calamities of life. Sickness and death may enter our dwellings at any time: they may attack us personally or those who are nearest and dearest to us, and we are obliged to bow to the sovereign dispensations of Him who ruleth over all. These are commonplace remarks, we know, nevertheless they contain a truth of which—unpalatable though it be—we need constant reminding.

Though we are quite familiar with the fact mentioned above, and see it illustrated daily on every side, yet we are reluctant and slow to acknowledge its application to *ourselves*. Such is human nature: we wish to ignore the unpleasant, and persuade ourselves that if our present lot be a happy one it will remain so for some time to come. But no matter how healthy we be, how vigorous our constitution, how well provided for financially, we must not think that our mountain is so strong it cannot be moved (Ps. 30:6, 7). Rather must we train ourselves to hold temporal mercies with a light hand, and use the relations and comforts of this life as though we had them not, 1 Cor. 7:30, remembering that "the fashion of this world passeth away." Our rest is not here, and if we build our nest in any earthly tree it should be with the realization that sooner or later the whole forest will be cut down.

Like many a one both before and since, the widow of Zarephath might have been tempted to think that all her troubles were now over. She might reasonably expect a blessing from entertaining the servant of God in her home, and a real and liberal blessing she received. In consequence of sheltering him, she and her son were supplied by a divine miracle in a time of famine for "many days"; and from this she might draw the conclusion that she had nothing further to fear. Yet the next thing recorded in our narrative is, "And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him" (1 Kings 17:17). The language in which this pathetic incident is couched seems to denote that her son was stricken suddenly, and so sorely that he expired quickly, before there was opportunity for Elijah to pray for his recovery.

How deeply mysterious are the ways of God! The strangeness of the incident now before us is the more evident if we link it with the verse immediately preceding: "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which He spake by Elijah. And it came to pass after *these* things that the son of the woman . . . fell sick," etc. Both she and her son had been miraculously fed for a considerable interval of time, and now he is drastically cut off from the land of the living, reminding us of those words of Christ concerning the sequel to an earlier miracle: "Your

fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead" (John 6:49). Even though the smile of the Lord be upon us and He is showing Himself strong on our behalf, this does not grant us an immunity from the afflictions to which flesh and blood is the heir. As long as we are left in this vale of tears we must seek grace to "rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11).

On the other hand, this widow had most certainly erred if she concluded from the snatching away of her son that she had forfeited the favor of God and that this dark dispensation was a sure mark of His wrath. Is it not written, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6)? Even when we have the clearest manifestations of God's good will—as this woman had in the presence of Elijah under her roof and the daily miracle of sustenance—we must be prepared for the frowns of Providence. We ought not to be staggered if we meet with sharp afflictions while we are treading the path of duty. Did not Joseph do so again and again? Did not Daniel? Above all, did not the Redeemer Himself? —So too with His apostles. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12).

Let it be duly noted that this poor soul had received particular marks of God's favor before she was cast into the furnace of affliction. It often happens that God exercises His people with the heaviest trials when they have been the recipients of His richest blessing. Yet here the anointed eye may discern His tender mercies. Does that remark surprise you, dear reader? Do you ask, How so? Why, the Lord, in His infinite grace, often *prepares* His children for suffering by previously granting them great spiritual enjoyments: giving them unmistakable tokens of His kindness, filling their hearts with His love, and diffusing an indescribable peace over their minds. Having tasted experimentally of the Lord's goodness, they are better fitted to meet adversity. Moreover, patience, hope, meekness and the other spiritual graces, can only be developed in the fire: the faith of this widow then, must needs be tried yet more severely.

The loss of her child was a heavy affliction for this poor woman. It would be so to any mother, but it was more especially severe on her, because she had previously been reduced to widowhood, and there would now be none left to support and comfort her declining years. In him all her affections were centered, and with his death all her hopes were destroyed: her coal was now indeed quenched (2 Sam. 14:7), for none remained to preserve the name of her husband on the earth. Nevertheless, as in the case of Lazarus and his sisters, this heavy blow was "for the glory of God" (John 11:4), and was to afford her a still more distinguishing mark of the Lord's favor. Thus it was, too, with Joseph and Daniel to whom we have alluded above: Severe and painful were their trails, yet subsequently God conferred yet greater honor upon them. O for faith to lay hold of the "afterward" of Hebrews 12:11!

"And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (v. 18). Alas, what poor, failing sinful creatures we are! How wretchedly we requite God for His abundant mercies! When His chastening hand is laid upon us, how often we rebel instead of meekly submitting thereto. Instead of humbling ourselves beneath God's mighty hand and begging Him to show wherefore He is contending with us (Job 10:2), we are far readier to blame some other person as being the cause of our trouble. Thus it was with this woman. Instead of entreating Elijah to pray with and for her—that God would enable her to understand wherein she had "erred" (Job 6:24), that He would be pleased to sanctify this affliction unto the good of her soul, and enable her to glorify Him "in the fires" (Isa. 24:15)—she reproached him. How sadly we fail to use our privileges.

"And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" This is in striking contrast with the calmness she had displayed when Elijah first encountered her. The swift calamity which had befallen her had come as a sore surprise, and in such circumstances, when trouble overtakes us unexpectedly, it is hard to keep our spirits composed. Under sudden and severe trials much grace is needed if we are to be preserved from impatience, petulant outbursts, and to exercise unshaken confidence in and complete submission to God. Not all of the saints are enabled to say with Job, "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? . . . the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 2:10; 1:21). But so far from such failure excusing us, we must judge ourselves unsparingly and contritely confess such sins unto God.

The poor widow was deeply distressed over her loss, and her language to Elijah is a strange mixture of faith and unbelief, pride and humility. It was the inconsistent outburst of an agitated mind as the disconnected and jerky nature of it intimates. First, she asks him, "What have I to do with thee?"—What have I done to displease thee? Wherein have I injured thee? She wished that she had never set eyes on him if he was responsible for the death of her child. Yet second, she owns him as "thou man of God"—and who was separated unto the divine service. She must have known by this time that the terrible drought had come upon Israel in answer to the prophet's prayers, and she probably concluded her own affliction had come in a similar way. Third, she humbled herself, asking, "Art thou come to me to call *my sin* to remembrance?"—possibly a reference to her former worship of Baal.

It is often God's way to employ afflictions in bringing former sins to our remembrance. In the ordinary routine of life it is so easy to go on from day to day without any deep exercise of conscience before the Lord, especially so when we are in the enjoyment of a replenished barrel. It is only as we are really walking closely with Him, or when we are smitten with some special chastisement of His hand that our conscience is sensitive before him. But when death entered her family the question of sin came up, for death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). It is always the safest attitude for us to assume when we regard our losses as the voice of God speaking to our sinful hearts, and diligently to examine ourselves, repent of our iniquities, and duly confess them unto the Lord, that we may obtain His forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).

It is at this very point that the difference between an unbeliever and a believer so often appears. When the former is

visited with some sore trouble or loss, the pride and self-righteousness of his heart is quickly manifested by his, "I know not what I have done to deserve this: I always sought to do what is right; I am no worse than my neighbors who are spared such sorrow—why should I be made the subject of such a calamity?" But how different is it with a person truly humbled. He is distrustful of himself, aware of his many shortcomings, and ready to fear that he has displeased the Lord. Such a one will diligently consider his ways (Hag. 1:5), reviewing his former manner of life and carefully scrutinizing his present behavior, so as to discover what has been or still is amiss, that it may be set right. Only thus can the fears of our minds be relieved and the peace of God confirmed in our souls.

It is this calling to mind our manifold sins and judging ourselves for them which will make us meek and submissive, patient and resigned. It was thus with Aaron who, when the judgment of God fell so heavily upon his family, "held his peace" (Lev. 10:3). It was thus with poor old Eli who had failed to admonish and discipline his sons, for when they were summarily slain, he exclaimed, "it is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good" (1 Sam. 3:18). The loss of a child may sometimes remind parents of sins committed with respect to it long previously. So it was with David when he lost his child by the hand of God smiting it for his wickedness (2 Sam. 12). No matter how heavy the loss, how deep his grief, when in his right mind the language of the saint will ever be, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are *right*, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75).

Though the widow and her son had been kept alive for many days, miraculously sustained by the power of God, whilst the rest of the people had suffered, yet she was less impressed by the divine beneficence than by His taking away her child: "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" While she seems to acknowledge God in the death of her son, she cannot shake off the thought that the prophet's presence was responsible for it. She attributes her loss to Elijah: as though he had been commissioned to go to her for the purpose of inflicting punishment upon her for her sin. As he had been sent to Ahab to denounce the drought upon Israel for their sin, so now she was afraid of his presence, alarmed at the very sight of him. Alas, how ready we are to mistake the grounds of our afflictions and ascribe them to false causes.

"And he said unto her, Give me thy son" (v. 19). In the opening paragraph of our last section we pointed out how the second half of 1 Kings 17 presents to us a picture of the domestic life of Elijah, his deportment in the widow's home at Zarephath. First, he evidenced his contentment with the humble fare, expressing no dissatisfaction with the unvarying menu day after day. And here we behold how he conducted himself under great provocation. The petulant outburst of this agitated woman was a cruel one to make unto the very man who had brought deliverance to her house. Her "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" Was uncalled for and unjust, and might well have prompted a bitter reply. It had undoubtedly done so had not the subduing grace of God been working with him, for Elijah was naturally of a warm temper.

The wrong construction which the widow placed upon Elijah's presence in her home was enough to shake any person. Blessed is it to observe there was no angry reply made to her inconsiderate judgment, but instead a "soft answer" to turn away her wrath. If one speaks to us unadvisedly with his lips that is no reason why we should descend to his level. The prophet took no notice of her passionate inquiry and thereby evidenced that he was a follower of Him who is "meek and lowly in heart," of whom we read "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet. 2:23). "Elijah saw that she was in extreme distress and that she spoke as one in great anguish of spirit; and therefore, taking no notice of her words, he calmly said to her "Give me thy son"; leading her at the same time to expect the restoration of her child through his intercession" (J. Simpson).

It may be thought that the last words cited above are entirely speculative: personally we believe that they are fully warranted by Scripture. In Hebrews 11:35 we read, "Women received their dead raised to life again." It will be remembered that this statement is found in the great faith chapter, where the Spirit has set forth some of the wondrous achievements and exploits of those who trust the living God. One individual case after another is mentioned, and then there is a grouping together and generalizing: "*who through faith subdued kingdoms . . . women received their dead raised to life again.*" There can be no room for doubt that the reference here is to the case now before us and the companion one in that of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:17-37). Here, then, is where the New Testament again throws its light upon the earlier Scriptures, enabling us to obtain a more complete conception of that which we are now considering.

The widow of Zarephath, though a Gentile, was a daughter of Sarah, to whom had been committed the faith of God's elect. Such a faith is a supernatural one, its author and object being supernatural. When this faith was first born within her we are not told—very likely while Elijah was sojourning in her home, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The supernatural character of her faith was evidenced by its supernatural fruits, for it was in response to her faith (as well as to Elijah's intercession) that her child was restored to her. What is the more remarkable is that, so far as the Word informs us, there has been no previous case of the dead being brought back again to life. Nevertheless, He who had caused a handful of meal to waste not and a little oil in a cruse to fail not while it sustained three people for "many days," surely He also *could* quicken the dead. Thus does faith reason: nothing is impossible to the Almighty.

It may be objected that there is no hint in the historical narrative of the widow's faith as to the restoring of her son to life, but rather a hint to the contrary. True, yet this in no wise contradicts what has been pointed out above. Nothing is said in Genesis about Sarah's faith to conceive seed, but instead her skepticism is mentioned. What is there in Exodus to suggest that the parents of Moses were exercising faith in God when they placed their son in the ark of bulrushes?—yet

see Hebrews 11:23. One would be hard put to it to find anything in the book of Judges which suggests that Samson was a man of faith, yet it is clear from Hebrews 11:32 that he was. But if nothing is said in the Old Testament of her *faith*, we may also note that the unkind words of the widow to Elijah are not recorded in the New Testament—any more than the unbelief of Sarah or the impatience of Job—because they are blotted out by the blood of the Lamb.

We are now to consider one of the most remarkable incidents recorded in the Old Testament, namely, the restoring to life of the widow's son at Zarephath. It is an incident staggering to unbelief, yet he who has any experimental acquaintance with the Lord finds no difficulty therein. When Paul was making his defense before Agrippa the apostle asked him, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible (not simply that a deceased person should be restored to life, but) that *God* should raise the dead?" Acts 26:8. Ah, there is where the believer throws all the emphasis: upon the absolute sufficiency of the One with whom he has to do. Bring into the scene the living God, and no matter how drastic and desperate be the situation, all difficulties at once disappear, for nothing is impossible to Him. He who first implanted life, He who now holdeth our souls in life (Ps. 66:9), can revivify the dead.

The modern infidel (like the Sadducees of old) may scoff at the divinely revealed truth of resurrection, but not so the Christian. And why? Because he has experienced in his own soul the quickening power of God: he has been brought from death unto life spiritually. Even though Satan should inject vile doubts into his mind, and for a while shake his confidence in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, yet he will soon recover his pose; he knows the blessedness of the grand verity, and when grace has again delivered him from the power of darkness, he will joyfully exclaim with the apostle "Christ liveth in me." Moreover, when he was born again, a supernatural principle was planted within his heart—the principle of faith—and that principle causes him to receive the Holy Scriptures with full assurance that they are indeed the Word of Him that cannot lie, and therefore does he believe *all* that the prophets have spoken.

Here is the reason why that which staggers and stumbles the wise of this world is plain and simple to the Christian. The preservation of Noah and his family in the ark, Israel's passing through the Red Sea dry-shod, the survival of Jonah in the whale's belly, present no difficulty to him at all. He knows that the Word of God is inerrant, for the truth thereof has been verified in his own experience. Having proved for himself that the Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation," he has no reason to doubt anything recorded in Holy Writ concerning the prodigies of His might in the material realm. The believer is fully assured that nothing is too hard for the Maker of heaven and earth. It is not that he is an intellectual simpleton, credulously accepting what is altogether contrary to reason, but that, in the Christian, reason is restored to its normal functioning: predicate (declare) a God who is almighty, and the supernatural working of His hand necessarily follows.

The entire subject of miracles is hereby reduced to its simplest factor. A great deal of learned jargon has been written on this theme: the laws of nature, their suspension, God's acting contrary thereto, and the precise nature of a miracle. Personally we would define a miracle as something which none but God Himself can perform. In so doing we are not under-estimating the powers possessed by Satan, or overlooking such passages as Revelation 16:14 and 19:20. It is sufficient for the writer that Holy Writ affirms the Lord to be "*He who alone doeth great wonders*" (Ps. 136:4). As for the "great signs and wonders" shown by false christs and false prophets, their nature and design is to "deceive" (Matthew 24:24), for they are "*lying wonders*" (2 Thess. 2:9), just as their predictions are false ones. Here we rest: God alone doeth great wonders, and being *God* this is just what faith expects from Him.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**Did Elijah ask God "why" he brought about the slaying of the widow's son upon the house where he lived? Was the "why" any of Elijah's business What was the content of Elijah's prayer?**

1 Kings 17:20-21    Amos 3:6    James 1:6-8    1 John 5:14

### **1 Kings 18:1-16**

To one filled with such zeal for the Lord and love for His people the prolonged inactivity to which he was forced to submit must have proved a severe trial to Elijah. So energetic and courageous a prophet would naturally be anxious to take advantage of the present distress of his countrymen: he would desire to awaken them to a sense of their grievous sins and urge them to return unto the Lord. Instead—so different are God's ways from ours—he was required to remain in complete seclusion month after month and year after year. Nevertheless, his Master had a wise and gracious design in this trying discipline of His servant. Throughout his long stay by the brook Cherith, Elijah proved the faithfulness and sufficiency of the Lord, and he gained not a little from his protracted sojourn at Zarephath. As the apostle reveals, both in 2 Corinthians 6:4 and 12:12, the first mark of an approved servant of Christ is the grace of spiritual "patience," and this is developed by the trials of faith, (Jas. 1:3).

The years spent by Elijah at Zarephath, were far from being wasted, for during his stay in the widow's home he obtained confirmation of his divine call, by the remarkable seal which was there given to his ministry. Thereby he approved himself to the conscience of his hostess: "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth," (17:24). It was highly important that the prophet should have such a testimony to the divine source of his mission before entering upon the more difficult and dangerous part of it which yet lay before him. His own

heart was blessedly confirmed and he was enabled to start afresh upon his public career with the assurance that he was a servant of Jehovah and that the Word of the Lord was indeed in his mouth. Such a seal to his ministry (the quickening of the dead child) and the approving of himself in the conscience of the mother was a grand encouragement for him as he set out to face the great crisis and conflict at Carmel.

What a message is there here for any ardent ministers of Christ whom Providence may for a season have laid by from public service! They are so desirous of doing good and promoting the glory of their Master in the salvation of sinners and the building up of their Master in the salvation of sinners and the building up of His saints, that they feel their enforced inactivity to be a severe trial. But let them rest assured that the Lord had some good reason for laying this restraint upon them, and therefore they should earnestly seek grace that they may not be fretful under it, nor take matters into their own hands in seeking to force a way out of it. Ponder the case of Elijah! He uttered no complaints nor did he venture out of the retirement into which God had sent him. He waited patiently for the Lord to direct him, to set him at liberty, and to enlarge his sphere of usefulness. Meanwhile, by fervent intercession, he was made a great blessing unto those in the home.

"And it came to pass after many days," (1 Kings 18:1). Let us attend to this expression of the blessed Spirit. It is not "after three years" (as was indeed the case), but "after many days." There is here an important lesson for our hearts if we will heed it: we should live a day at a time, and count our lives by days. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down," (Job. 14:1, 2). Such was the view of life taken by the aged Jacob: for when Pharaoh asked the patriarch, "How old are thou?" He answered, "the days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years," (Gen. 47:9). Happy are they whose constant prayer is "so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," (Ps. 90:12). Yet how prone we are to count by years. Let us endeavor to live each day as though we knew it was our last.

"And it came to pass": that is, the predetermined counsel of Jehovah was now actualized. The fulfillment of the divine purpose can neither be retarded nor forced by us. God will not be hurried either by our petulance or our prayers. We have to wait His appointed hour, and when it strikes, He acts—it "comes to pass" just as He had foreordained. The precise length of time His servant is to remain in a certain place was predestined by Him from all eternity. "It came to pass after many days": that is, over a thousand since the drought had commenced, "that the word of the Lord came to Elijah." God had not forgotten His servant. The Lord never forgets any of His people, for has He not said, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me." Isa. 49:16? O that we might never forget Him, but "set the Lord always before us," (Ps. 16:8)!

The word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth," (1 Kings 18:1). So that we may better understand the tremendous test of the prophet's courage which this command involved, let us seek to obtain some idea of what must now have been that state of that wicked king's mind. We commenced this study of the life of Elijah by pondering the words, "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word," (17:1). Now we are to consider the sequel to this. We have seen how it fared with Elijah during the lengthy interval, we must now ascertain how things were going with Ahab, his court, and his subjects. Dreadful indeed must be the state of things on earth when the heavens are shut up and no moisture is given for three years. "There was a sore famine in Samaria," (18:2).

"And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts," (v. 5). The barest possible outline is here presented, but it is not difficult to fill in the details. Israel had sinned grievously against the Lord, and so they were made to feel the weight of the rod of His righteous anger. What a humbling picture of God's favored people, to behold their king going forth to seek grass, if perchance he could find a little somewhere so that the lives of those beasts which remained might be saved. What a contrast with the abundance and glory of Solomon's days! But Jehovah had been grossly dishonored, His truth had been rejected. The vile Jezebel had defiled the land by the pestilential influence of her false prophets and priests. The altars of Baal had supplanted that of the Lord, and therefore, as Israel had sown the wind, they must now be made to reap the whirlwind.

And what effect had the severe judgment of Heaven produced upon Ahab and his subjects? "And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land unto all fountains of water and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts." There is not a single syllable here about God! Not a word about the awful sins which had called down His displeasure upon the land! Fountains, brooks and grass were all that occupied Ahab's thoughts—*relief* from the divine affliction was all he cared about. It is ever thus with the reprobate. It was so with Pharaoh: as each fresh plague descended upon Egypt he sent for Moses and begged him to pray for its removal, and as soon as it was removed he hardened his heart and continued to defy the most High. Unless God is pleased to sanctify directly to our souls His chastisements, they profit us not. No matter how severe His judgments or how long they be protracted, man is never softened thereby unless God performs a work of grace *within* him. "And they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds," (Rev. 16:10, 11).

Nowhere is the awful depravity of human nature more grievously displayed than at this very point. First, men look upon a prolonged dry season as a freak of nature which must be endured, refusing to see the hand of God in it. Later, if it

be borne in upon them that they are under a divine judgment, they assume a spirit of defiance, and brazen things out. A later prophet in Israel complained of the people in his day for manifesting this vile temper: "O Lord, are not Thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou has consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock," (Jer. 5:3). From this we may see how utterly absurd and erroneous are the teachings of Romanists on purgatory and of Universalists on hell. "The imagined fire of purgatory or the real torments of Hell possess no purifying effect, and the sinner under the anguish of his sufferings will continually increase in wickedness and accumulate wrath to all eternity" (Thomas Scott).

"And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself," (vv. 5, 6). What a picture do these words present! Not only had the Lord no place in his thoughts, but Ahab says nothing about his people, who next to God should have been his chief concern. His evil heart seemed incapable of rising higher than horses and mules: such was what concerned him in the day of Israel's dire calamity. What a contrast between the low groveling selfishness of this wretch and the noble spirit of the man after God's own heart. "And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father's house," (2 Sam. 24:17): that was the language of a regenerate king when his land was trembling beneath God's chastening rod because of his sin.

As the drought continued and the distressing effects thereof became more and more acute we can well imagine the bitter resentment and hot indignation borne by Ahab and his vile consort against the one who had pronounced the terrible interdict (order) of no dew nor rain. So incensed was Jezebel that she had "cut off (slain) the prophets of the Lord," (v. 4), and so infuriated was the king that he had sought diligently for Elijah in all the surrounding nations, requiring an oath from their rulers that they were not providing asylum for the man whom he regarded as his worst enemy, and cause of all his trouble. And now the Word of the Lord came to Elijah saying, "Go, show thyself unto Ahab!" If much boldness had been required when he was called upon to announce the awful drought, what intrepidity was needed for him now to face the one who sought him with merciless rage.

It came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying go, show thyself to Ahab." The movements of Elijah were all ordered of God: he was "not his own" but the servant of another. When the Lord bade him "hide thyself," (17:3), he must retire at His orders, and when He said "Go, show thyself" he must comply with the divine will. Elijah's courage did not fail him, for "the righteous are bold as a lion," (Prov. 28:1). He declined not the present commission but went forth without murmur or delay. Humanly speaking, it was highly dangerous for the prophet to return unto Samaria, for he could not expect any welcome from the people who were in such sore straits nor any mercy from the king. But with the same unhesitating obedience as had previously characterized him, so now he complied with his Master's orders. Like the Apostle Paul he counted not his life dear unto himself, but was ready to be tortured and slain if that was the Lord's will for him.

"And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him," (v. 7). A few extremists ("separatists") have grossly traduced (criticized) the character of Obadiah, denouncing him as an unfaithful compromiser, as one who sought to serve two masters. But the Holy Spirit has not stated he did wrong in remaining in Ahab's employ, nor intimated that his spiritual life suffered in consequence: instead, He has expressly told us that "Obadiah feared the Lord greatly," (v. 3), which is one of the highest encomiums which could be paid him. God has often given His people favor in the sight of heathen masters (as Joseph and Daniel), and has magnified the sufficiency of His grace by preserving their souls in the midst of the most unpromising environments. His saints are found in very unlikely places—as in "*Caesar's* household," (Phil. 4:22).

There is nothing wrong in a child of God holding a position of influence if he can do so without the sacrifice of principle. And indeed, it may enable him to render valuable service to the cause of God. Where would Luther and the Reformation have been, humanly speaking, had it not been for the Elector of Saxony? And what would have been the fate of our own Wycliffe if John of Gaunt had not constituted him his ward? As the governor of Ahab's household Obadiah was undoubtedly in a most difficult and dangerous position, yet so far from bowing his knee to Baal he was instrumental in saving the lives of many of God's servants. Though surrounded by so many temptations he preserved his integrity. It is also to be carefully noted that when Elijah met him he uttered no word of reproach unto Obadiah. Let us not be too hasty in changing our situation, for the Devil can assail us in one place just as easily as in another.

As Elijah was on his way to confront Ahab, he met the pious governor of the king's household, "And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?" (v. 7). Obadiah recognized Elijah, yet he could scarcely believe his eyes. It was remarkable that the prophet had survived the merciless onslaught of Jezebel on the servants of Jehovah: it was still more incredible to see him here, alone, journeying into Samaria. Most diligent search had long been made for him, but in vain, and now he comes unexpectedly upon him. Who can conceive the mixed feelings of awe and delight as Obadiah gazed upon the man of God, by whose word the awful drought and sore famine had almost completely desolated the land? Obadiah at once showed the greatest respect for him and did obeisance to him. "As he had showed the tenderness of a father to the sons of the prophets, so he showed the reverence of a son to the father of the prophets, and by this made it appear he did indeed fear the Lord greatly" (Matthew Henry).

"And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here," (v. 8). The prophet's courage did not fail him.

He had received orders from God to "show himself unto Ahab," and therefore he made no attempt to conceal his identity when interrogated by the governor: let us shrink not boldly to declare our Christian discipleship when challenged by those who meet us. It is also to be duly noted that Elijah honored Ahab, wicked though he was, by speaking of him to Obadiah as "thy lord." It is the duty of inferiors to show respect to their superiors: of subjects concerning their sovereign, of servants concerning their master. We must render to all, that to which their office or station entitles them. It is no mark of spirituality to be vulgar in our conduct or brusque in our speech. God commands us to "Honor the king," (1 Pet. 2:17)—because of his *office*—even if he be an Ahab or a Nero.

"And he answered him, I am: go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?" (vv. 8, 9). It was only natural that Obadiah should wish to be excused from so perilous an errand. First, he asks *wherein* he had offended either the Lord or His prophet that he should be asked to be the messenger of such distasteful tidings to the king—sure proof that his own conscience was clear! Second, he lets Elijah know of the great pains which his royal master had taken in endeavoring to track down the prophet and discover his hiding place: "As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee," (v. 10.). Yet in spite of all their diligence they were not able to discover him: so effectually did God secure him from their malice. Utterly futile is it for man to attempt to hide when the Lord seeks him out: equally useless is it for him to seek when God hides anything from him.

"And now thou sayest, go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here," (v. 11.). Surely you are not serious in making such a request. Do you not know the consequences will be fatal to me if I am unable to make good such a declaration! "And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth," (v. 12). He was afraid that Elijah would again mysteriously disappear, and then his master would likely be enraged because he had not arrested the prophet, and certainly he would be furious if he found himself imposed upon by discovering no trace of him when he duly arrived at this spot. Finally, he asks, "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid a hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? (v. 13). Obadiah made reference to these noble and daring deeds of his, not in any boastful spirit, but for the purpose of attesting his sincerity. Elijah reassured him in God's name, and Obadiah obediently complied with his request: "And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him today. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah," (vv. 15, 16).

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

### **What do you think is the highest compliment a person can receive?**

1 Kings 18:3

### **1 Kings 18:17**

Previously we have seen Elijah called suddenly out of obscurity to appear before the wicked king of Israel and deliver unto him a fearful sentence of judgment, namely, that "there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Following the pronouncement of this solemn ultimatum, the prophet, in obedience to his Master, retired from the stage of public action and went into seclusion, spending part of the time by the brook Cherith and part in the humble home of the widow at Zarephath, where in each place his needs were miraculously supplied by God, who suffers none to be the loser by complying with His orders. But now the hour had arrived when this intrepid servant of the Lord must issue forth and once more face Israel's idolatrous monarch: "the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab" (1 Kings 18:1).

We contemplated the effect which the protracted drought had upon Ahab and his subjects, an effect which made sadly evident the depravity of the human heart. It is written, "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4); and again, "when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9). How often do we find these sentences cited as though they are absolute and unqualified statements, and how rarely are the words quoted which immediately follow them: in the one case "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath," and in the other "Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." How are we going to understand these passages, for to the natural man they appear to cancel themselves, the second part of the Isaiah reference seeming flatly to contradict the former.

If Scripture be compared with Scripture it will be found that each of the above declarations receives clear and definite exemplification. For example, was it not a sense of the Lord's goodness—His "lovingkindness" and "the multitude of His tender mercies"—which led David to repentance and made him to cry, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:1, 2)? And again, was it not his realization of the Father's goodness—the fact that there was 'bread enough and to spare' in His house—which led the prodigal son to repentance and confession of his sins? So also when God's judgments were in the earth, to such an extent that we are told, 'In those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation



was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity,' (2 Chron. 15:5, 6), did Asa and his subjects (in response to the preaching of Azariah) 'put away the abominable idols out of all the land, and renewed the altar of the Lord . . . and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart" (vv. 8-12). See also Revelation 11:15.

On the other hand, how many instances are recorded in Holy Writ of individuals and of peoples who were the subjects of God's goodness to a marked degree, who enjoyed both His temporal and spiritual blessings in unstinted measure, yet so far were those privileged persons from being suitably affected thereby and led to repentance, their hearts were hardened and God's mercies were abused: "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deut. 32:15 and cf. Hosea 13:6). So, too, how often we read in Scripture of God's judgments being visited upon both individuals and nations, only for them to illustrate the truth of that word, "Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see" (Isa. 26:11). A conspicuous example is Pharaoh, who after each plague hardened his heart afresh and continued in his defiance of Jehovah. Perhaps even more notable is the case of the Jews, who century after century have been inflicted with the sorest judgments from the Lord, yet have not learned righteousness thereby.

Ah, have we not witnessed striking demonstrations of these truths in our own lifetime, both on the one side and on the other? Divine favors were received as a matter of course, yea, were regarded far more as the fruits of our own industry than of divine bounty. The more the nations were prospered the more God faded from view.

How, then, are we to understand these Divine declarations: "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance"; "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness"? Obviously they are not to be taken absolutely and without modification. They are to be understood with this proviso: if a sovereign God is pleased to sanctify them unto our souls. It is God's ostensible (we say not, His secret and invincible) design that displays of His goodness should lead men into the paths of righteousness: such is their natural tendency, and such ought to be their effect upon us. Yet the fact remains that neither prosperity nor adversity by themselves will produce these beneficent results, for where the divine dispensations are not expressly sanctified unto us, neither His mercies nor His chastisements avail to work any improvement in us.

Hardened sinners "despise the Lord's goodness and long-suffering," prosperity rendering them the less disposed to receive the instructions of righteousness, and where the means of grace (the faithful preaching of God's Word) are freely afforded among them, they continue profane and close their eyes to all the discoveries of divine grace and holiness. When God's hand is lifted up to administer gentle rebukes, it is despised; and when more terrible vengeance is inflicted, they steel their hearts against the same. It has always been thus. Only as God is pleased to work in our hearts, as well as before our eyes, only as He deigns to bless unto our souls His providential dealings, is a teachable disposition wrought in us, and we are brought to acknowledge His justice in punishing us and to reform our evil ways. Whenever divine judgments are not definitely sanctified to the soul, sinners continue to stifle conviction and rush forward in defiance, until they are finally swallowed up by the wrath of a holy God.

Does someone ask, What has all the above to do with the subject in hand? The answer is, much every way. It goes to show that the terrible perversity of Ahab was no exceptional thing, while it also serves to explain why he was quite unaffected by the sore visitation of God's judgment on his dominions. A total drought which had continued for upwards of three years was upon the land, so that 'there was a sore famine in Samaria' (1 Kings 18:2). This was indeed a divine judgment: did, then, the king and his subjects learn righteousness thereby? Did their ruler set them an example by humbling himself beneath the mighty hand of God, by acknowledging his vile transgressions, by removing the altars of Baal and restoring the worship of Jehovah? No! So far from it, during the interval he suffered his wicked consort to "cut off the prophets of the Lord" (18:4), thus adding iniquity to iniquity and exhibiting the fearful depths of evil into which the sinner will plunge unless deterred by God's restraining power.

"And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all foundations of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts" (1 Kings 18:5). As a straw in the air reveals the direction of the wind so these words of Ahab indicate the state of his heart. The living God had no place in his thoughts, nor was he exercised over the sins which had called down His displeasure on the land. Nor does he seem to have been the least concerned about his subjects, whose welfare—next to the glory of God—should have been his chief concern. No, his aspirations do not appear to have risen any higher than fountains and brooks, horses and mules, that the beasts which yet remained might be saved. This is not evolution but devolution, for when the heart is estranged from its Maker its direction is ever lower and lower.

In the hour of his deep need Ahab turned not in humility unto God, for he was a stranger to Him. Grass was now his all-absorbing object—provided that could be found, he cared nothing about anything else. If food and drink were obtainable then he could have enjoyed himself in the palace and been at ease among Jezebel's idolatrous prophets, but the horrors of famine drove him out. Yet instead of dwelling upon and rectifying the causes thereof, he seeks only a temporary relief. Alas, he had sold himself to work wickedness and had become the slave of a woman who hated Jehovah. And, my reader, Ahab was not a Gentile, a heathen, but a favored Israelite; but he had married a heathen and become enamored with her false gods. He had made shipwreck of the faith and was being driven to destruction. What a terrible thing it is to depart from the living God and forsake the Refuge of our fathers!

"So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself" (v. 6). The reason for this procedure is obvious: by the king going in one direction and the

governor of his household in another, twice as much ground would be covered as if they had remained together. But may we not also perceive a mystical meaning in these words: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). And what agreement was there between these two men? No more than there is between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, for whereas the one was an apostate, the other feared the Lord from his youth (v. 12). It was meet, then, they should separate and take opposite courses, for they were journeying unto entirely different destinies eternally. Let not this suggestion be regarded as "far fetched," but rather let us cultivate the habit of looking for the spiritual meaning and application beneath the literal sense of Scripture.

"And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him" (v. 7). This certainly appears to confirm the mystical application made of the previous verse, for there is surely a spiritual meaning in what we have just quoted. What was "the way" which Obadiah was treading? It was the path of duty, the way of obedience to his master's orders. True, it was a humble task he was performing: that of seeking grass for horses and mules, yet this was the work Ahab had assigned him, and while complying with the king's word he was rewarded by meeting Elijah! A parallel case is found in Genesis 24:27, where Eliezer in compliance with Abraham's instructions encountered the damsel whom the Lord had selected as a wife for Isaac: "I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." So also it was while she was in the path of duty (when gathering of sticks) that the widow of Zarephath met with the prophet.

We considered the conversation which took place between Obadiah and Elijah, but would just mention here that mixed feelings must have filled the heart of the former as his gaze encountered such an unexpected but welcome sight. Awe and delight would predominate as he beheld the one by whose word the fearful drought and famine had almost completely desolated the land: here was the prophet of Gilead, alive and well, calmly making his way, alone, back into Samaria. It seemed too good to be true and Obadiah could scarcely believe his eyes. Greeting him with becoming deference, he asks, "Art thou that my lord Elijah?" Assuring him of his identity, Elijah bids him go and inform Ahab of his presence. This was an unwelcome commission, yet it was obediently discharged: "so Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him" (v. 16).

And what of Elijah while he awaited the approach of the apostate king: was his mind uneasy, picturing the angry monarch gathering around him his officers ere he accepted the prophet's challenge, and then advancing with bitter hatred and murder in his heart? No, my reader, we cannot suppose so for a moment. The prophet knew full well that the One who had watched over him so faithfully, and supplied his needs so graciously during the long drought, would not fail him now. Had he not good reason to recall how Jehovah had appeared to Laban when he was hotly pursuing Jacob: "And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob from good to bad" (Gen. 31:24 [margin]). It was a simple matter for the Lord to over-awe the heart of Ahab and keep him from murdering Elijah, no matter how much he desired to do so. Let the servants of God fortify themselves with the reflection that He has their enemies completely under His control, He has His bridle in their mouths and turns them about just as He pleases, so that they cannot touch a hair of their heads without His knowledge and permission.

Elijah then waited with dauntless spirit and calmness of heart for the approach of Ahab, as one who was conscious of his own integrity and of his security in the Divine protection. Well might he appropriate to himself those words: "In God have I put my trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me." Different far must have been the state of the king's mind as "Ahab went to meet Elijah" (v. 16). Though incensed against the man whose fearful announcement had been so accurately fulfilled, yet he must have been half afraid to meet him. Ahab had already witnessed his uncompromising firmness and amazing courage, and knowing that Elijah would not now be intimidated by his displeasure, had good reason to fear that his meeting would not be honorable unto himself.

The very fact that the prophet was seeking him out, yea had sent Obadiah before him to say, "Behold, Elijah is here," must have rendered the king uneasy. Wicked men are generally great cowards: their own consciences are their accusers, and often cause them many misgivings when in the presence of God's faithful servants, even though these occupy an inferior position in life to themselves. Thus it was with King Herod in connection with Christ's forerunner, for we are told, "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy" (Mark 6:20). In like manner, Felix, the Roman governor, trembled before Paul (though he was his prisoner) when the apostle "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Let not the ministers of Christ hesitate boldly to deliver their message, nor be afraid of the displeasure of the most influential in their congregations.

"And Ahab went to meet Elijah." We might have hoped that, after proving from painful experience that the Tishbite was no deceiver, but a true servant of Jehovah whose word had accurately come to pass, Ahab had now relented, been convinced of his sin and folly, and become ready to turn to the Lord in humble repentance. But not so: instead of advancing toward the prophet with a desire to receive spiritual instruction from him or to request his prayers for him, he fondly hoped that he might now avenge himself for all that he and his subjects had suffered. His opening salutation at once revealed the state of his heart: "Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" (v. 17)—what a contrast from the greeting given Elijah by the pious Obadiah! No word of contrition fell from Ahab's lips. Hardened by sin, his conscience "seared as with a hot iron," he gave vent to his fury.

"Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" This is not to be regarded as an unmeasured outburst, the petulant expression of a sudden surprisal, but rather as indicating the wretched state of his soul, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." It was the avowed antagonism between evil and good: it was the hissing of the Serpent's seed against one of the members of Christ: it was the vented spite of one who felt condemned by the very

presence of the righteous. Years later, speaking of another devoted servant of God, whose counsel was demanded by Jehoshaphat, this same Ahab said, "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil," (22:8). So far, then, from this charge of Ahab's making against the character and mission of Elijah, it was a tribute to his integrity, for there is no higher testimony to the fidelity of God's servants than their evoking of the hearty hatred of the Ahab's around them.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

### **Explain why God's judgments lead some people to repentance while others become more hardened to Him?**

Rom. 9:18

### **What other ministers in the Bible beside Elijah were falsely accused as being troublers of people and nations?**

Amos 7:10    Matt. 5:11-12    Luke 23:5    John 7:7    Acts 16:20    Acts 17:6

### **1 Kings 18:18-19**

"And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim" (18:18). Had Elijah been one of those cringing sycophants (fawning flatterers) which are usually found in attendance upon kings, he had thrown himself at Ahab's feet, suing for mercy, or rendering mean submission. Instead, he was the ambassador of a greater King, even the Lord of hosts: conscious of this, he preserved the dignity of his office and character by acting as one who represented a superior power. It was because Elijah realized the presence of Him by whom kings reign, who can restrain the wrath of man and make the remainder thereof to praise Him, that the prophet feared not the face of Israel's apostate monarch. Ah, my reader, did we but realize more of the presence and sufficiency of our God, we should not fear what anyone might do unto us. Unbelief is the cause of our fears. O to be able to say "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid" (Isa. 12:2).

Elijah was not to be intimidated by the wicked aspersion (slandering remark) which had just been cast upon him. With undaunted courage, he first denies the foul charge: "I have not troubled Israel." Happy for us if we can truthfully make the same claim: that the chastisements which Zion is now receiving at the hands of a holy God have not been caused in any measure by my sins. Alas, who among us could affirm this? Second, Elijah boldly returns the charge upon the king himself, placing the blame where it duly belonged: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house." See here the fidelity of God's servant: as Nathan said to David, so Elijah unto Ahab, "Thou art the man." A truly solemn and heavy charge: that Ahab and his father's house were the cause of all the sore evils and sad calamities which had befallen the land. The divine authority with which he was invested warranted Elijah thus to indict the king himself.

Third, the prophet proceeded to supply proof of the charge which he had made against Ahab: "in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." So far from the prophet being the enemy of his country he sought only its good. True, he had prayed for and called down God's judgment for the wickedness and apostasy of the king and nation, but this was because he desired they should repent of their sins and reform their ways. It was the evil doings of Ahab and his house which had called down the drought and famine. The king and his family were the leaders in rebellion against God, and the people had blindly followed: here then was the cause of the distress: they were the reckless "troublers" of the nation, the disturbers of its peace, the displeasers of God.

Those who by their sins provoke God's wrath are the real troublers, and not those who warn them of the dangers to which their wickedness exposes them. "Thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." It is quite plain even from the comparatively brief record of Scripture that Omri, the father of Ahab, was one of the worst kings that Israel ever had, and Ahab had followed in the wicked steps of his father. The statues of those kings were the grossest idolatry. Jezebel, Ahab's wife, had no equal for her hatred of God and His people and her zeal for the worship of debased idols. So powerful and persistent was their evil influence that it prevailed some two hundred years later (Micah 6:16), and drew down the vengeance of Heaven upon the apostate nation.

"In that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord." Therein lies the very essence and heinousness of sin. It is a throwing off of the divine yoke, a refusing to be in subjection to our Maker and Governor. It is a willful disregard of the Lawgiver and rebellion against His authority. The law of the Lord is definite and emphatic. Its first statute expressly forbids our having any other gods than the true God; and the second prohibits our making of any graven image and bowing down ourselves before it in worship. These were the awful crimes which Ahab had committed, and they are in substance those which our own evil generation is guilty of, and that is why the frown of Heaven now lies so heavily upon us. "Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts" (Jer. 2:19). "And thou hast followed Baalim": when the true God is departed from, false ones take His place—"Baalim" is in the plural number, for Ahab and his wife worshipped a variety of false deities.

"Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table" (v. 19). Very remarkable is this: to behold Elijah alone, hated by Ahab, not only charging the king with his crimes, but giving him instructions, telling him what he must do. Needless to say, his conduct on this occasion did not furnish a precedent or set an example for all God's

servants to follow under similar circumstances. The Tishbite was endowed with extraordinary authority from the Lord, as is intimated by that New Testament expression, "the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Exercising that authority Elijah demanded there should be a convening of all Israel at Carmel, and that thither should also be summoned the prophets of Baal and Ashtaroath, who were dispersed over the country at large. More strange still was the preemptory language used by the prophet: he simply issued his orders without offering any reason or explanation as to what was his real object in summoning all the people and prophets together.

In the light of what follows, the prophet's design is clear: what he was about to do must be done openly and publicly before impartial witnesses. The time had now arrived when things must be brought to a head: Jehovah and Baal come face to face as it were, before the whole nation. The venue selected for the test was a mountain in the tribe of Asher, which was well situated for the people to gather there from all parts—it was, be it noted, outside the land of Samaria. It was on Carmel that an altar had been built and sacrifices offered on it unto the Lord (see v. 30), but the worship of Baal had supplanted even this irregular service of the true God—irregular, for the Law prohibited any altars outside those in the temple at Jerusalem. There was only one way in which the dreadful drought and its resultant famine could be brought to an end and the blessing of Jehovah restored to the nation, and that was by the sin which had caused the calamity being dealt with in judgment, and for that Ahab must gather all Israel together on Carmel.

"As Elijah designed to put the worship of Jehovah on a firm foundation, and to restore the people to their allegiance to the God of Israel, he would have the two religions to be fairly tested, and by such a splendid miracle as none could question: and as the whole nation was deeply interested in the issue, it should take place most publicly, and on an elevated spot, on the summit of lofty Carmel, and in the presence of all Israel. He would have them all to be convened on this occasion, that they might witness with their own eyes both the absolute power and sovereignty of Jehovah, whose service they had renounced, and also the entire vanity of those idolatrous systems which had been substituted for it" (John Simpson). Such ever marks the difference between truth and error: the one courts the light, fearing no investigation; whereas error, the author of which is the prince of darkness, hates the light, and thrives most under cover of secrecy.

There is nothing to indicate that the prophet made known unto Ahab his intention: rather does he appear to have summarily ordered the king to summon together the people and the prophets: all concerned in the terrible sin—leaders and led—must be present. "So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel." And why did Ahab comply so meekly and promptly with Elijah's demand? The general idea among the commentators is that the king was now desperate, and as beggars cannot be choosers he really had no other alternative than to consent. After three and a half years' famine the suffering must have been so acute that if the sorely-needed rain could be obtained in no other way except by being beholden to the prayers of Elijah, then so be it. Personally, we prefer to regard Ahab's acquiescence as a striking demonstration of the power of God over the hearts of men, yea, even over the king's, so that "He turneth it withersoever He will," Prov. 21:1.

This is a truth—a grand and basic one—which needs to be strongly emphasized in this day of skepticism and infidelity, when attention is confined to secondary causes and the prime mover is lost to view. Whether it be in the realm of creation or providence, it is the creature rather than the Creator who is regarded. Let our fields and gardens bear good crops, and the industry of the farmer and the skill of the gardener are praised; let them yield poorly, and the weather or something else is blamed: neither God's smile nor His frown is owned. So too in political affairs. How few, how very few acknowledge the hand of God in the present conflict of the nations. And let it be affirmed that the Lord is dealing with us in judgment for our sins, and even the majority of professing Christians are angered by such a declaration. But read through the Scriptures and observe how frequently it is there said, the Lord "stirred" up the spirit of a certain king to do this, "moved" him to do that, or "withheld" him from doing the other.

As this is so rarely recognized and so feebly apprehended today we will cite a number of passages in proof. "I also withheld thee from sinning against me" (Gen. 20:6). "I will harden his (Pharaoh's) heart, that he shall not let the people go" (Ex. 4:21). "The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies" (Deut. 28:25). "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him;" (Judges 13:25). "And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon" (1 Kings 11:14). "And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria" (1 Chron. 5:26). "The Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistine" (2 Chron. 21:16). "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation" (Ezra 1:1). "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them" (Isa. 13:17). "I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field" (Ezek. 16:7). "Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots" (Ezek. 26:7).

"So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel." In the light of the above scriptures, what believing heart will doubt for a moment that it was the Lord who made Ahab willing in the day of His power, willing to obey the one whom he hated above all others! And when God works, He works at both ends of the line: He who inclined the wicked king to carry out Elijah's instructions, moved not only the people of Israel but also the prophets of Baal to comply with Ahab's proclamation, for He controls His foes as truly as He does His friends. Possibly the people in general assembled together under the hope of beholding the rain fall at the call of Elijah while the false prophets probably looked with contempt upon their being required to journey unto Carmel at the demand of Elijah through Ahab.

Because the divine judgment had been inflicted on account of the apostasy of the nation and especially as a testimony against its idolatry, the nation must be (outwardly and avowedly at least) reclaimed before the judgment could be removed. The lengthy drought had wrought no change, and the consequent famine had not brought the people back to God. So far as we can gather from the inspired narrative, the people were, with few exceptions, as much wedded to their idols as ever; and whatever may have been either the convictions or the practices of the remnant who bowed not their knee to Baal, they were so afraid publicly to express themselves (lest they be put to death) that Elijah was unaware of their very existence. Nevertheless, till the people were brought back unto their allegiance to God, no favor could be expected from Him.

"They must repent and turn themselves from their idols, or nothing could avail to avert God's judgment. Though Noah and Samuel and Job had made intercession, it would not have induced the Lord to withdraw from the conflict. They must forsake their idols and return to Jehovah." Those words were written almost a century ago, yet they are as true and pertinent now as they were then, for they enunciate an abiding principle. God will not wink at sin or gloss over evil doing. Whether He be dealing in judgment with an individual or with a nation, that which has displeased Him must be rectified before there can be a return of His favor. It is useless to pray for His blessing while we refuse to put away that which has called down His curse. It is vain to talk about exercising faith in God's promises until we have exercised repentance for our sins. Our idols must be destroyed ere God will gain accept of our worship.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

### **Why did Ahab comply with Elijah's demand to gather all the false prophets of Israel onto Mount Carmel?**

Ex. 4:21    1 Chr. 5:26    Prov. 21:1

#### **1 Kings 18:20-21**

"So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel" (1 Kings 18:20). Let us endeavour to picture the scene. It is early morning. From all sides the eager crowds are making their way toward this spot, which from remotest times has been associated with worship. No work is being done anywhere: a single thought possesses the minds of young and old alike as they respond to their king's summons to gather together for this mighty concourse. Behold the many thousands of Israel occupying every foot of vantage ground from which they could obtain a view of the proceedings! Were they to witness a miracle? Was an end now to be put unto their sufferings? Was the long hoped-for rain about to fall? A hush descends upon the multitude as they hear the tread of marshaled men: conspicuous with the sun-symbols flashing on their turbaned heads, sure of court favor and insolently defiant, come the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Then, through the crowds, is carried a litter of the king, on the shoulders of his guard of honor, surrounded by his officers of state. Something like that must have been the scene presented on this auspicious occasion.

"And Elijah came unto all the people" (v. 21). Behold the sea of upturned faces as every eye is focused on this strange and stern figure, at whose word the heavens had been as brass for the last three years. With what intense interest and awe must they have gazed upon this lone man of sinewy build, with flashing eyes and compressed lips. What a solemn hush must have fallen upon that vast assembly as they beheld one man pitted against the whole company. With what malignant glances would his every movement be watched by the jealous priests and prophets. As one commentator puts it, "No tiger ever watched its victim more fiercely! If they may have their way, he will never touch yonder plain again," As Ahab himself watched this servant of the Most High, fear and hatred must have alternated in his heart, for the king regarded Elijah as the cause of all his troubles, yet he felt that somehow the coming of rain depended upon him.

The stage was now set. The huge audience was assembled, the leading characters were about to play their parts, and one of the most dramatic acts in the whole history of Israel was about to be staged. There was to be a public contest between the forces of good and evil. On the one side was Baal with his hundreds of prophets, on the other Jehovah and His lone servant. How great was the courage of Elijah, how strong his faith, as he dared to stand alone in the cause of God against such powers and numbers. But we need not fear for the intrepid Tishbite: he needs no sympathy of ours. He was consciously standing in the presence of One to whom the nations are but as a drop in the bucket. All Heaven was behind him. Legions of angels filled that mountain, though they were invisible to the eye of sense. Though he was but a frail creature like ourselves, yet Elijah was full of faith and spiritual power, and by that faith he subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight and turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

"Elijah stands forth before them all with a confident and majestic mien, as the ambassador of heaven. His manly spirit, emboldened by the consciousness of the divine protection, inspired with courage, and awed all opposition. But what an awful and loathsome sight presented itself to the man of God, to see such a gathering of Satan's agents who had withdrawn the people of Jehovah from His holy and honorable service, and had seduced them into the abominable and debasing superstitions of the Devil! Elijah was not a kindred spirit with those who can see with composure their God insulted, their fellow-countrymen degrading themselves at the instigation of wily men, and destroying their immortal souls through the gross impositions practiced upon them. He could not look with a placid eye upon the four hundred and fifty

vile impostors, who made it their business, for filthy lucre or for courtly favor, to delude the ignorant multitude to their eternal destruction. He looked upon idolatry as a crying shame: as nothing better than evil personified, the Devil deified, and Hell formed into a religious establishment; and he would regard the abettors of the diabolical system with abhorrence" (John Simpson).

It seems reasonable to conclude that Ahab and his assembled subjects would expect Elijah on this occasion to pray for rain, and that they would now witness the sudden end of the long drought and its attendant famine. Had not the three years of which he had prophesied (1 Kings 17:1), run their weary course? Was mourning and suffering now to give place to joy and plenty again? Ah, but there was something else besides praying that the windows of Heaven might be opened, something of much greater importance which must first be attended to. Neither Ahab nor his subjects were yet in any fit state of soul to be made the recipients of His blessings and mercies. God had been dealing with them in judgment for their awful sins, and thus far His rod had not been acknowledged, nor had the occasion of His displeasure been removed. As Matthew Henry pointed out, "God will first prepare our hearts, and then cause His ear to hear: will first turn us to Him and then turn to us (Ps. 10:17). Deserters must not look for God's favors till they return to their allegiance."

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said," The servant of God at once took the initiative, being in complete command of the situation. It is unspeakably solemn to note that he said not a single word to the false prophets, making no attempt to convert them. They were devoted to destruction (v. 40). No, instead he addressed himself to the people, of whom there was some hope, saying, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (v. 21). The word for "halt" is totter: they were not walking uprightly. Sometimes they tottered over to the side of the God of Israel, and then they lurched like an intoxicated person over on the side of the false gods. They were not fully decided which to follow. They dreaded Jehovah, and therefore would not totally abandon Him; they desired to curry favor with the king and queen, and so felt they must embrace the religion of the state. Their conscience forbade them to do the former, their fear of man persuaded them to do the latter; but in neither were they heartily engaged. Thus Elijah upbraided them with their inconstancy and fickleness.

Elijah made a demand for definite decision. It is to be borne in mind that Jehovah was the name by which the God of the Israelites had always been distinguished since their coming out of Egypt. Indeed, the Jehovah-God of their fathers was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob (Ex. 3:15, 16). "Jehovah" signifies the self-existent, omnipotent, immutable, and Eternal Being, the only God, beside whom there is none else. "If Jehovah be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." There was no "if" in the mind of the prophet: he knew full well that Jehovah was the one true and living God, but the people must be shown the untenability and absurdity of their vacillation. Religions which are diametrically opposed cannot both be right: one must be wrong, and as soon as the true is discovered, the false must be cast to the winds. The present-day application of Elijah's demand would be this: if the Christ of Scripture be the true Savior, then surrender to Him; if the christ of modern Christendom, then follow him. One who demands the denying of self, and another who allows the gratifying of self, cannot both be right. One who requires the uncompromising mortification of sin, and another who suffers you to trifle with it, cannot both be the Christ of God.

There were times when those Israelites attempted to serve both God and Baal. They had some knowledge of Jehovah, but Jezebel with her host of false prophets had unsettled their minds. The example of the king misled them and his influence corrupted them. The worship of Baal was popular and his prophets feted; the worship of Jehovah was discountenanced and His servants put to death. This caused the people in general to conceal any regard they had for the Lord. It induced them to join in the idolatrous worship in order to escape ill will and persecution. Consequently they halted between the two parties. They were like "lame persons" unsteady, limping up and down. They vacillated in their sentiments and conduct. They thought so to accommodate themselves to both parties as to please and secure the favor of both. There was no evenness in their walk, no steadiness in their principles, no consistency in their conduct. Thus they both dishonored God and debased themselves by this mongrel kind of religion, wherein they "feared the Lord, and served other gods" (2 Kings 17:33). But God will not accept a divided heart: He will have all or none.

The Lord is a jealous God, demanding our whole affection, and will not accept a divided empire with Baal. You must be for Him or against Him. He will permit of no compromise. You must *declare yourself*. When Moses saw the people of Israel dancing around the golden calf, after destroying the idol and rebuking Aaron, he stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me" (Ex. 32:26). O my reader, if you have not already done so, resolve with godly Joshua, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). Ponder these solemn words of Christ: "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30). Nothing is so repulsive to Him as the lukewarm professor: "I could wish you you were cold or hot" (Rev. 3:15)—one thing or the other. He has plainly warned us that "no man can serve two masters." Then "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Come to some decision one way or the other, for there can be no compromise between Christ and Belial.

There are some who have been brought up under the protection and sanctifying influence of a godly home. Later, they go out into the world, and are apt to be dazzled by its glittering tinsel and carried away by its apparent happiness. Their foolish hearts hanker after its attractions and pleasures. They are invited to participate, and are sneered at if they hesitate. And only too often, because they have not grace in their hearts, nor strength of mind to withstand the temptations, they are drawn aside, heeding the counsel of the ungodly and standing in the way of sinners. True, they cannot altogether forget their early training, and at times an uneasy conscience will move them to read a chapter out of the Bible and to say their prayers; and so they halt between two alternatives and vainly attempt to serve two masters.

They will not cleave to God alone, relinquish all for Him and follow Him with undivided hearts. They are halters, borderers, who love and follow the world, and yet retain something of the form of godliness.

There are others who cling to an orthodox creed, yet enter into the gaities of the world and freely indulge the lusts of the flesh. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him" (Titus 1:16). They attend religious services regularly, posing as worshippers of God through the one Mediator and claiming to be indwelt by that Spirit through whose gracious operations the people of God are enabled to turn from sin and to walk in the paths of righteousness and true holiness. But if you entered their homes, you would soon have reason to doubt their pretensions. You would find no worship of God in their family circle, perhaps none, or at best a mere formal worship in private; you would hear nothing about God or His claims in their daily conversation, and see nothing in their conduct to distinguish them from respectable worldlings; yea, you would behold some things which the more decent non-professors would be ashamed of. There is such a lack of integrity and consistency in their characters as renders them offensive to God and contemptible in the eyes of men of understanding.

There are yet others who must also be classed among those who halt and hesitate, being inconstant in their position and practice. This is a less numerous class, who have been brought up in the world, amid its follies and vanities. But by affliction, the preaching of God's Word, or some other means, they have been made sensible that they must turn to the Lord and serve Him if they are to escape the wrath to come and lay hold on eternal life. They have become dissatisfied with their worldly life, yet, being surrounded with worldly friends and relatives, they are afraid of altering their line of conduct, lest they should give offense to their godless companions and bring down upon them their scoffs and opposition. Hence they make sinful compromises, trying to conceal their better convictions but neglecting many of God's claims upon them. Thus they halt between two opinions: what God will think of them, and what the world will think of them. They have not that firm reliance on the Lord which will lead them to break from His enemies and be out and out for Him.

There is one other class which we must mention, who, though they differ radically from those which we have described above, yet must be regarded as proper subjects to ask, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" While they are certainly to be pitied, yet they must be reprov'd. We refer to those who know that the Lord is to be loved and served with all the heart and in all that He commands, but for some reason or other they fail to avow themselves openly on His side. They are outwardly separated from the world, taking no part in its empty pleasures, and none can point to anything in their conduct which is contrary to the Scriptures. They honor the Sabbath day, attend regularly the means of grace, and like to be in the company of God's people. Yet they do not publicly take their place among the followers of Christ and sit down at His table. Either they feel too unworthy to do so, or fear they might bring some reproach on His cause. But such weakness and inconsistency is wrong. If the Lord be God, follow Him as He bids, and trust Him for all needed grace.

"If Jehovah be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." The double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). We must be as decided in our practice as in our opinion or belief, otherwise—no matter how orthodox our creed—our profession is worthless. It was evident there could not be two supreme Gods, and therefore Elijah called upon the people to make up their minds which was really God; and as they could not possibly serve two masters, let them give their whole hearts and undivided energies to that Being whom they concluded to be the true and living God. And this is what the Holy Spirit is saying to you, my unsaved reader: weigh the one against the other—the idol you have been giving your affections unto and Him whom you have slighted; and if you are assured that the Lord Jesus Christ be "the true God" (1 John 5:20), then choose Him as your portion, surrender to Him as your Lord, cleave to Him as your all in all. The Redeemer will not be served by halves or with reserves.

"And the people answered him not a word" (v. 21): either because they were unwilling to acknowledge their guilt, and thereby offend Ahab; or because they were unable to refute Elijah, and so were ashamed of themselves. They did not know what to say. Whether convicted or confused, we know not; but certainly they were confounded—incapable of finding an error in the prophet's reasoning. They seem to have been stunned that such alternatives should be presented to their choice, but they were neither honest enough to own their folly nor bold enough to say they had acted in compliance with the king's command, following a multitude to do evil. They therefore sought refuge in silence, which is to be much preferred to the frivolous excuses proffered by most of such people today when they are rebuked for their evil ways. There can be little doubt but what they were awed by the searching questions of the prophet.

"And the people answered him not a word." O for that plain and faithful preaching which would so reveal to men the unreasonableness of their position, which would so expose their hypocrisy, so sweep away the cobwebs of their sophistry, which would so arraign them at the bar of their own consciences that their every objection would be silenced, and they would stand self-condemned. Alas, on every side we behold those who are seeking to serve both God and mammon, attempting to win the smile of the world and to earn the "well done" of Christ. Like Jonathan of old, they wish to retain their standing in Saul's palace and yet keep in with David. And how many professing Christians there are in these days who can hear Christ and His people reviled, and never open their mouths in reprimand—afraid to stand up boldly for God, ashamed of Christ and His cause, though their consciences approve of the very things for which they hear the Lord's people criticized. O guilty silence, which is likely to meet with a silent Heaven when they are pleased to cry for mercy.

"Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire

under. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken" (vv. 22-24). This was an eminently fair challenge, because Baal was supposed to be the fire god, or lord of the sun. Elijah gave the false prophets the preference, so that the outcome of the contest might be the more conspicuous to the glory of God. The proposal was so reasonable that the people at once assented to it, which forced their seducers out into the open: they must either comply with the challenge or acknowledge that Baal was an impostor.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

### **How will those with a divided heart be judged at the Judgment Day?**

Ex. 32:26 Josh. 24:15 Matt. 12:30 Titus 1:16 1 John 5:20 Rev. 3:15

### **1 Kings 18:22-26**

"Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men" (1 Kings 18:22). The righteous are bold as a lion: undeterred by difficulties, undismayed by the numbers which are arrayed against difficulties, undismayed by the numbers which are arrayed against them. If God be for them (Rom. 8:31), it matters not who be against them, for the battle is His and not theirs. True, there were "a hundred men of the Lord's prophets" hidden away in a cave (v. 13), but what were they worth to His cause? Apparently they were afraid to show their faces in public, for there is no hint that they were present here on Carmel. Out of the four hundred and fifty-one prophets assembled on the mount that day, Elijah only was on the side of Jehovah. Ah, my readers, truth cannot be judged by the numbers who avow and support it: the Devil has ever had the vast majority on his side. And is it any otherwise today? What percentage of present-day preachers are uncompromisingly proclaiming the truth, and among them how many practice what they preach?

"Let them therefore give us two bullocks, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God" (vv. 23, 24). The time had now arrived when things must be brought to a head: Jehovah and Baal brought face to face as it were before the whole nation. It was of the utmost importance that the people of Israel should be roused from their ungodly indifference and that it should be incontrovertibly settled who was the true God, entitled to their obedience and worship. Elijah therefore proposed to put the matter beyond dispute. It had already been demonstrated by the three years' drought, at the word of the prophet, that Jehovah could withhold rain at His pleasure, and that the prophets of Baal could not reverse it or produce either rain or dew. Now a further test shall be made, a trial by fire, which came more immediately within their own province, since Baal was worshipped as the lord of the sun, and his devotees consecrated to him by "passing through the fire" (2 Kings 16:3). It was therefore a challenge which his prophets could not refuse without acknowledging they were but impostors.

Not only was this trial by fire one which forced the prophets of Baal out into the open and therefore made manifest the emptiness of their pretensions, but it was one eminently calculated to appeal to the minds of the people of Israel. On how many a glorious occasion in the past had Jehovah "answered by fire!" That was the sign given to Moses at Horeb, when "the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed" (Ex. 3:2). This was the symbol of His presence with His people in their wilderness wanderings: "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light" (Ex. 13:21). Thus it was when the covenant was made and the Law was given, for "mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace" (Ex. 19:18). This too was the token He gave of His acceptance of the sacrifices which His people offered upon His altar: "there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces" (Lev. 9:24). So it was in the days of David: (see 1 Chron. 21:26). Hence the descent of supernatural fire from heaven on this occasion would make it manifest to the people that the Lord God of Elijah was the God of their fathers.

"The God that answereth by fire." How strange! Why not "The God that answereth by water?" That was what the land was in such urgent need of. True, but before the rain could be given, something else had to intervene. The drought was a divine judgment upon the idolatrous country and God's wrath must be appeased before His judgment could be averted. And this leads us to the deeper meaning of this remarkable drama. There can be no reconciliation between a holy God and sinners save on the ground of atonement, and there can be no atonement or remission of sins except by the shedding of blood. Divine justice must be satisfied: the penalty of the broken law must be inflicted—either on the guilty culprit or upon an innocent substitute. And this grand and basic truth was unmistakably set before the eyes of that assembled host on Mount Carmel. A bullock was slain, cut in pieces, and laid upon wood, and He who caused fire to descend and consume that sacrifice avouched Himself to be the true and only God of Israel. The fire of God's wrath must fall either on the guilty people or on a sacrificial substitute.



As we have pointed out above, the descent of fire from Heaven on the vicarious victim (1 Chron. 21:26), was not only the manifestation of God's holy wrath, consuming that upon which sin was laid, but it was also the public attestation of His acceptance of the sacrifice, as it ascended to Him in the smoke as a sweet-smelling savor. It was therefore an evident proof that sin had been dealt with, atoned for, put away, divine holiness now being vindicated and satisfied. Therefore it was that on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended, appearing as "cloven tongues like as of fire," Acts 2:3. In his explanation of the phenomena of that day, Peter said, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear," and again, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:32, 33, 36). The gift of the Spirit as "tongues like as of fire" evidenced God's acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice, testified to His resurrection from the dead, and affirmed His exaltation to the Father's throne.

"The God that answereth by fire." Fire, then, is the evidence of the divine presence (Ex. 3:2): it is the symbol of His sin-hating wrath (Mark 9:43-49): it is the sign of His acceptance of an appointed and substitutionary sacrifice, (Lev. 9:24): it is the emblem of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3), Who enlightens, inflames and cleanses the believer. And it is by fire that He shall yet deal with the unbeliever, for when the despised and rejected Redeemer returns, it will be "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:8, 9). And again it is written, the Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41, 42). Unspeakably solemn is this: alas that the unfaithful pulpit now conceals the fact that "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). O what a fearful awaking there will yet be, for in the last day it shall appear that "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15).

"Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God." It will thus be seen that the test submitted by Elijah was a threefold one: it was to center around a slain sacrifice; it was to evidence the efficacy of prayer; it was to make manifest the true God by the descent of fire from Heaven, which in its ultimate significance pointed to the gift of the Spirit as the fruit of an ascended Christ. And it is at these same three points, my reader, that every religion—our religion—must be tested today. Does the ministry you sit under focus your mind upon, draw out your heart unto, and demand your faith in, the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ? If it fails to do so, you may know it is not the gospel of God. Is the One you worship a prayer-answering God? If not, either you worship a false god, or you are not in communion with the true God. Have you received the Holy Spirit as a sanctifier? If not, your state is no better than that of the heathen.

It must of course be borne in mind that this was an extraordinary occasion, and that Elijah's procedure supplies no example for Christ's ministers to follow today. Had not the prophet done according to divine commission, he had acted in mad presumption, tempting God, by demanding such a miracle at His hands, placing the truth at such hazard. But it is quite clear from his own statement that he acted on instructions from Heaven: "I have done all these things at Thy Word" (v. 36). That, and nothing else but that, is to regulate the servants of God in all their undertakings: they must not go one iota beyond what their Divine commission calls for. There must be no experimenting, no acting in self-will, no following of human traditions; but a doing of all things according to God's Word. Nor was Elijah afraid to trust the Lord as to the outcome. He had received his orders, and in simple faith had carried them out, fully assured that Jehovah would not fail him, and put him to confusion before that great assembly. He knew that God would not place him at the front of the battle, and then desert him. True, a wondrous miracle would have to be wrought, but that occasioned no difficulty to one who dwelt in the secret place of the Most High.

"And the god that answereth by fire, *let Him be God*," let Him be accounted and owned as the true God: followed, served and worshipped as such. Since He has given such proofs of His existence, such demonstrations of His mighty power, such manifestations of His character, such a revelation of His will, all unbelief, indecision and refusal to give Him His rightful place in our hearts and lives is utterly inexcusable. Then let Him be your God, by surrendering yourself to Him. He does not force Himself upon you, but condescends to present Himself to you: deigns to offer Himself to your acceptance, bids you choose Him by an act of your own will. His claims upon you are beyond dispute. It is for your own good that you should make Him your God—your supreme good, your portion, your King. It is your irreparable loss and eternal destruction if you fail to do so. Heed, then, that affectionate invitation of His servant: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

"And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken" (v. 24). They were agreed that such a proposal should be made, for it struck them as an excellent method of determining the controversy and arriving at the truth as to who was the true God and who was not. This would be a demonstration to their senses, the witnessing of a miracle. The word which Elijah had addressed to their conscience had left them silent, but an appeal to their reason was at once approved. Such a supernatural sign would make it evident that the sacrifice had been accepted of God, and they were eagerly anxious to witness the unique experiment. Their curiosity was all-alive, and they were keen to ascertain whether Elijah or the

prophets of Baal should obtain the victory. Alas, such is poor human nature; ready to witness the miracles of Christ, but deaf to His call to repentance; pleased with any outward show that appeals to the senses, but displeased with any word that convicts and condemns. Is it thus *with us*?

It is to be noted that Elijah not only gave his opponents choice of the two bullocks, but also conceded them the stage for the first trial, that they might, if they could, establish the claims of Baal and their own power, and thus settle the dispute without any further action: yet knowing full well they would be foiled and confused. In due course the prophet would do, in every respect, what they had done, so that there should be no difference between them. Only one restriction was placed upon them (as also on himself) namely, "put no fire under" (v. 23), the wood—so as to prevent any fraud. But there was a deeper principle involved, one which was to be unmistakably demonstrated that day on Carmel—man's extremity is God's opportunity. The utter impotency of the creature must be felt and seen before the power of God could be displayed. Man has first to be brought to the end of himself ere the sufficiency of divine grace is appreciated. It is only those who know themselves to be undone and lost sinners who can welcome One who is mighty to save.

"And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made" (vv. 25, 26). For the first time in their history these false priests were unable to insert the secret spark of fire among the sticks which lay upon their altar. They were compelled, therefore, to rely on a direct appeal to their patron deity. And this they did with might and main. Round and round that altar they went in their wild and mystic dance, breaking rank now and again to leap up and down on the altar, all the while repeating their monotonous chant, "O Baal, hear us, O Baal hear us"—send down fire on the sacrifice. They wearied themselves with going through the various exercises of their idolatrous worship, keeping it up three whole hours.

But notwithstanding all their importunity with Baal, "There was no voice nor any that answered." What a proof that idols are but "the work of men's hands." "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: . . . they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not . . . they that make them are like unto them; so is everyone that trusteth in them" (Ps. 115:4-8). "No doubt Satan could have sent fire (Job. 1:9-12), and would, if he might have done it; but he could do nothing except what is permitted him" (Thomas Scott). Yes, we read of the second beast of Revelation 13 that "he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" (v. 13). But on this occasion the Lord would not suffer the Devil to use his power, because there was an open trial between Himself and Baal.

"But there was no voice nor any that answered." The altar stood cold and smokeless, the bullock unconsumed. The powerlessness of Baal and the folly of his worshippers were made fully apparent. The vanity and absurdity of idolatry stood completely exposed. No false religion, my reader, is able to send down fire upon a vicarious sacrifice. No false religion can put away sin, bestow the Holy Spirit, or grant supernatural answers to prayer. Tested at these three vital points they one and all fail, as Baal's worship did that memorable day on Carmel.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**What is the meaning of the descent of fire from heaven upon the victim on the altar in 1 Chronicles 21:26?**

**What is the meaning of the "cloven tongues like as fire" in Acts 2:3?**

Acts 2:32, 33, 36

### **1 Kings 18:27-30**

"And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked," (1 Kings 18:27). Hour after hour the prophets of Baal had called upon their god to make public demonstration of his existence by causing fire to come down from heaven and consume the sacrifice which they had placed upon his altar; but all to no purpose: "there was no voice, nor any that answered." And now the silence was broken by the voice of the Lord's servant, speaking in derision. The absurdity and fruitlessness of their efforts richly merited this biting sarcasm. Sarcasm is a dangerous weapon to employ, but its use is fully warranted in exposing the ridiculous pretensions of error, and is often quite effective in convincing men of the folly and unreasonableness of their ways. It was due unto the people of Israel that Elijah should hold up to contempt those who were seeking to deceive them.

"And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them." It was at midday, when the sun was highest and the false priests had the best opportunity of success, that Elijah went near them and in ironical terms bade them increase their efforts. He was so sure that nothing could avert their utter discomfiture that he could afford to ridicule them by suggesting a cause for the indifference of their god: "Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awaked." The case is so urgent, your credit and his honor are so much at stake, that you must arouse him: therefore shout louder, for your present cries are too feeble, they are not heard, your voice does not reach his remote dwelling place: you must redouble your efforts in order to

gain his attention. Thus did the faithful and intrepid Tishbite pour ridicule on their impotency and hold up to contempt their defeat. He knew it would be so, and that no zeal on their part could change things.

Is the reader shocked at these sarcastic utterances of Elijah on this occasion? Then let us remind him that it is written in the Word of Truth, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:4). Unspeakably solemn is this, yet unmistakably just: they had laughed at God and derided His warnings and threatenings, and now He answers such fools according to their folly. The Most High is indeed longsuffering, yet there is a limit to His patience. He calls unto men, but they refuse; He stretches out His hand unto them, but they will not regard. He counsels them, but they set it all at nought; He reproves, but they will have none of it. Shall, then, He be mocked with impunity? No, He declares, "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me" (Prov. 1:24-28).

The derision of Elijah upon Mount Carmel was but a shadowing forth of the derision of the Almighty in the day when He deals in judgment. Is our own lot now cast in such a day? "because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke." Who, with any spiritual discernment, can deny that those fearful words accurately describe the conduct of our own generation? Is then the awful sentence now going forth, "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the ease of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (Prov. 1:29-32 [margin])? If so, who can question the righteousness of it? How blessed to note that this unspeakably solemn passage ends with—"but whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." That is a precious promise for faith to lay hold of, to plead before God, and to expect an answer thereto, for our God is not a deaf or impotent one like Baal.

One would have thought those priests of Baal had perceived that Elijah was only mocking them while he lashed them with such cutting irony, for what sort of a god must he be which answered to the prophet's description! Yet so infatuated and stupid were those devotees of Baal that they do not appear to have discerned the drift of his words, but rather to have regarded them as containing good advice. Accordingly, they roused themselves to yet greater earnestness, and by the most barbarous measures strove to move their god by the sight of the blood which they shed out of love to him and zeal in his service, and in which they supposed he delighted. What poor, miserable slaves are idolaters, whose objects of worship can be gratified with human gore and with the self-inflicted torments of their worshippers! It has even been true, and still is today, that "the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Ps. 74:20). How thankful we should be if a sovereign God has mercifully delivered us from such superstitions.

"And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them" (v. 28). What a concept they must have held of their deity who required such cruel lacerations at their hands! Similar sights may be witnessed today in heathendom. The service of Satan, whether in the observance of idolatrous worship or in the practice of immoralities, while it promises indulgence to men's lusts is cruel to their persons and tends to torment them in this world. Jehovah expressly forbade His worshippers to "cut themselves" (Deut. 14:1). He indeed requires us to mortify our corruptions, but bodily severities are no pleasure to Him. He desires only our happiness, and never requires one thing which has not a direct tendency to make us more holy that we may be more happy, for there cannot be any real happiness apart from holiness.

"And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded" (v. 29). Thus they continued praying and prophesying, singing and dancing, cutting themselves and bleeding, until the time when the evening sacrifice was offered in the temple at Jerusalem, which was at 3 p.m. For six hours without intermission had they importuned their god. But all the exertions and implorings of Baal's prophets were unavailing: no fire came down to consume their sacrifice. Surely the lengths to which they had gone was enough to move the compassion of any deity! And since the heavens remained completely silent, did it not prove to the people that the religion of Baal and his worship was a delusion and a sham?

"There was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." How this exposed the powerlessness of false gods. They are impotent creatures, unable to help their devotees in the hour of need. They are useless for this life; how much more so for the life to come! Nowhere does the imbecility which sin produces more plainly evidence itself than in idolatry. It makes utter fools of its victims, as was manifest there on Carmel. The prophets of Baal reared their altar and placed upon it the sacrifice, and then called upon their god for the space of six hours to evidence his acceptance of their offering. But in vain. Their importunity met with no response: the heavens were as brass. No tongue of fire leaped from the sky to lick up the flesh of the slain bullock. The only sound heard was the cries of anguish from the lips of the frantic priests as they maltreated themselves till their blood gushed forth.

And my reader, if you be a worshipper of idols, and continue so, you shall yet discover that your god is just as impotent and disappointing as was Baal. Is your belly your god? Do you set your heart upon enjoying the fat of the land, eating and drinking, not to live, but living to eat and drink? Does your table groan beneath the luxuries of the earth, while many today are lacking its necessities? Then know you that, if you persist in this wickedness and folly, the hour is coming when you shall discover the madness of such a course.

Is pleasure your god? Do you set your heart upon a ceaseless whirl of gaiety—rushing from one form of entertainment to another, spending all your available time and money in visiting the garish shows of "Vanity Fair?" Are

your hours of recreation made up of a continual round of excitement and merriment? Then know you that, if you persist in this folly and wickedness, the hour is coming when you shall taste of the bitter dregs which lie at the bottom of such a cup.

Is mammon your god? Do you set your heart upon material riches, bending all your energies to the obtaining of that which you imagine will give you power over men, a place of prominence in the social world, and enable you to procure those things which are supposed to make for comfort and satisfaction? Is it the acquisition of property, a large bank-balance, the possession of stocks and shares, for which you are bartering your soul? Then know you that, if you persist in such a senseless and evil course, the time is coming when you shall discover the worthlessness of such things, and their powerlessness to mitigate your remorse.

O the folly, the consummate madness of serving false gods! From the highest viewpoint it is madness, for it is an affront unto the true God, a giving unto some other object that which is due unto Him alone, an insult which He will not tolerate or pass by. But even on the lowest ground it is crass folly, for no false god, no idol, is capable of furnishing real help at the time man needs help most of all. No form of idolatry, no system of false religion, no god but the true One, can send miraculous answers to prayer, can supply satisfactory evidence that sin is put away, can give the Holy Spirit, who, like fire, illumines the understanding, warms the heart and cleanses the soul. A false god could not send down fire on Mount Carmel, and he cannot do so today. Then turn to the true God, my reader, while there is yet time.

Before passing on, there is one other point which should be noted in what has been before us, a point which contains an important lesson for this superficial age. Let us state it thus: the expenditure of great earnestness and enthusiasm is no proof of a true and good cause. There is a large class of shallow-minded people today who conclude that a display of religious zeal and fervor is a real sign of spirituality, and that such virtues fully compensate for whatever lack of knowledge and sound doctrine there may be. "Give me a place," say they, "where there is plenty of life and warmth even though there be no depth to the preaching, rather than a sound ministry which is cold and unattractive." Ah, my reader, all is not gold that glitters. Those prophets of Baal were full of earnest zeal and fervor, but it was in a false cause, and brought down nothing from Heaven! Then take warning therefrom, and be guided by God's Word and not by what appeals to your emotions or love of excitement.

"And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him" (v. 30). Clearly evident was it that nothing could be gained by waiting any longer. The test which had been proposed by Elijah, which had been approved by the people, and which had been accepted by the false prophets, had convincingly demonstrated that Baal could have no claim to be the (true) God. The time had thus arrived for the servant of Jehovah to act. Remarkable restraint had he exercised all through those six hours while he had allowed his opponents to occupy the stage of action, breaking the silence only once to goad them on to increased endeavor. But now he addressed the people, bidding them to come near unto himself, that they might the better observe his actions. They responded at once, no doubt curious to see that he would do and wondering whether his appeal to Heaven would be more successful than had been that of the prophets of Baal.

"And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down" (v. 30). Mark well his first action, which was designed to speak unto the hearts of those Israelites. Another has pointed out that here on Carmel Elijah made a threefold appeal unto the people. First, he had appealed to their consciences, when he asked and then exhorted them: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him" (v. 21). Second, he had appealed to their reason, when he had proposed that trial should be made between the prophets of Baal and himself that "the god that answereth by fire, let Him be God" (v. 24). And now, by "repairing the altar of the Lord," he appealed to their hearts. Therein he has left an admirable example for the servants of God in every age to follow. The ministers of Christ should address themselves unto the consciences, the understandings and the affections of their hearers, for only thus can the truth be adequately presented, the principal faculties of men's souls be reached, and a definite decision for the Lord be expected from them. A balance must be preserved between the Law and the Gospel. Conscience must be searched, the mind convinced, the affections warmed, if the will is to be moved unto action. Thus it was with Elijah on Carmel.

"And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him." How strong and unwavering was the prophet's confidence in God. He knew full well what his faith and prayer had obtained from the Lord, and he had not the slightest fear that he would now be disappointed and put to confusion. The God of Elijah never fails any who trust in Him with all their hearts. But the prophet was determined that this answer by fire should be put beyond dispute. He therefore invited the closest scrutiny of the people as he repaired the broken altar of Jehovah. They should be in the nearest proximity so that they might see for themselves there was no trickery, no insertion of any secret spark beneath the wood on which the slain bullock was laid. Truth does not fear the closest investigation. It does not shun the light, but courts it. It is the evil one and his emissaries who love darkness and secrecy, and act under the cloak of mysticism.

"And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down" (v. 30). There is far more here than meets the eye at first glance. Light is cast thereon by comparing the language of Elijah in 19:10—"The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars." According to the Mosaic law there was only one altar upon which sacrifices might be offered, and that was where the Lord had fixed His peculiar residence—from the days of Solomon, in Jerusalem. But before the tabernacle was erected, sacrifices might be offered in any place, and in the previous dispensation altars were built wherever the patriarchs sojourned for any length of time, and it is probably unto them that Elijah alluded in 19:10. This broken altar, then, was a solemn witness that the people had departed from God. The prophet's repairing of the

same was a rebuking of the people for their sin, a confession of it on their behalf, and, at the same time, bringing them back to the place of beginning.

And reader, this is recorded for our instruction: Elijah began by repairing the broken altar. And that is where we must begin if the blessing of Heaven is to come again on the churches and on our land. In many a professing Christian home there is a neglected altar of God. There was a time when the family gathered together and owned God in the authority of His Law, in the goodness of His daily providence, in the love of His redemption and continuing grace, but the sound of united worship no longer is heard ascending from that home. Prosperity, worldliness, pleasure, has silenced the accents of devotion. That altar has fallen down: the dark shadow of sin rests on that house. And there can be no approach to God while sin is unconfessed. They who hide sin cannot prosper (Prov. 28:13). Sin must be confessed before God will respond with holy fire. And sin must be confessed in deed as well as in word: the altar must be set up again. The Christian must go back to the place of beginning. (See Gen. 13: 1-4; Rev. 2:4, 5).

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**Explain how Proverbs 1:29-32 sums up what has been said of the Baal worshippers as well as those today who have despised or even ignored the word of the Lord.**

**What does the repairing of the altar that was broken down in 1 Kings 18:30 symbolize?**

Gen. 13:1-4    1 Kings 19:10    Rev. 2:4-5

### **1 Kings 18:31-36**

"And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name" (Kings 18:31). This was striking and blessed, for it was taking the place of faith against the evidence of sight. There were present in that assembly only the subjects of Ahab, and consequently, members of none but the ten tribes. But Elijah took twelve stones to build the altar with, intimating that he was about to offer sacrifice in the name of the whole nation (cf. Josh. 4:20; Ezra 6:17). Thereby he testified to their unity, the union existing between Judah and the ten tribes. The Object of their worship had originally been one and the same and must be so now. Thus Elijah viewed Israel from the divine standpoint. In the mind of God the nation had appeared before Him as one from all eternity. Outwardly they were now two. But the prophet ignored that division: he walked not by sight, but by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). This is what God delights in. Faith is that which honors Him, and therefore does He ever own and honor faith wherever it is found. He did so here on Carmel, and He does so today. "Lord, increase our faith."

And what is the grand truth that was symbolized by this incident? Is it not obvious? Must we not look beyond the typical (foreshadow) and natural Israel unto the antitypical (that which was foreshadowed) and spiritual Israel, the Church which is the Body of Christ? Surely! Then what? This: amid the widespread dispersion which now obtains—the "children of God" which are "scattered abroad" (John 11:52)—amid the various denominations, we must not lose sight of the mystical and essential oneness of all the people of God. Here too we must walk by faith and not by sight. We should view things from the divine standpoint: we should contemplate that Church which Christ loved and for which He gave Himself as it exists in the eternal purpose and everlasting counsels of the blessed Trinity. We shall never see the unity of the Bride, the Lamb's wife, visibly manifested before our outward eyes until we behold her descending out of Heaven "having the glory of God." But meanwhile it is both our duty and privilege to enter into God's ideal, to perceive the spiritual unity of His saints, and to own that unity by receiving into our affections all who manifest something of the image of Christ. Such is the truth inculcated by the "twelve stones" used by Elijah.

"And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob." Let us also take notice how Elijah was regulated here by the Law of the Lord. God had given express directions about His altar: "If thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon" (Ex. 20: 25, 26). In strict accordance with that Divine statute, Elijah did not send for stones that had been quarried and polished by human art, but used rough and unhewn stones which lay upon the mountain side. He took what God had provided and not what man had made. He acted according to the divine pattern furnished him in the Holy Scriptures, for God's work must be done in the manner and method appointed by God.

This too is written for our learning. Each several act on this occasion, every detail of Elijah's procedure, needs to be noted and pondered if we would discover what is required from us if the Lord is to show Himself strong on our behalf. In connection with His service God has not left things to our discretion nor to the dictates of either human wisdom or expediency. He has supplied us with a "pattern" (compare Heb. 8:5), and He is very jealous of that pattern and requires us to be ordered by the same. Everything must be done as God has appointed. The moment we depart from God's pattern, that is, the moment we fail to act in strict conformity to a "thus saith the Lord," we are acting in self-will, and can no longer count upon His blessing. We must not expect "the fire of God" until we have fully met His requirements.

In view of what has just been pointed out, need we have any difficulty in discovering why the blessing of God has departed from the churches, why His miracle-working power is no longer seen working in their midst? It is because there

has been such woeful departure from His "pattern," because so many innovations have come in, because they have employed carnal weapons in their spiritual warfare, because they have wickedly brought in worldly means and methods. In consequence, the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched. Not only must the occupant of the pulpit heed the divine injunction and preach "the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2), but the whole service, discipline and life of the church must be regulated by the directions God has given. The path of obedience is the path of spiritual prosperity and blessing, but the way of self-will and self-seeking is one of impotency and disaster.

"And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed" (v. 32). Ah, take note of that: "He built an altar in the name of the Lord": that is, by His authority, for His glory. And thus should it ever be with us: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). This is one of the basic rules for the governance of all our actions. O what a difference it would make if professing Christians were regulated thereby. How many difficulties would be removed and how many problems solved. The young believer often wonders whether this or that practice is right or wrong. Let it be brought in this touchstone: Can I ask God's blessing upon it? Can I do it in the name of the Lord? If not, then it is sinful. Alas, how much in Christendom is now being done under the Holy Name of Christ which He has never authorized, which is grievously dishonoring to Him, which is a stench in His nostrils. "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

"And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood" (v. 33). And here again observe how strictly Elijah kept to the "pattern" furnished him in the Scriptures. Through Moses the Lord had given orders in connection with the burnt offering that, "he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood" (Lev. 1:6-8). Those details in the conduct of Elijah are the more noteworthy because of what is recorded of the prophets of Baal on this occasion: nothing is said of their "putting the wood in order" or of "cutting the bullock in pieces and laying him on the wood," but merely that they "dressed it and called on the name of Baal" (v. 26). Ah, it is in these "little things" as men term them, that we see the difference between the true and false servants of God.

"And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood," And is there not here also important instruction for us? The work of the Lord is not to be performed carelessly and hurriedly, but with great precision and reverence. Think of whose service we are engaged in if we be the ministers of Christ. Is He not richly entitled to our best? How we need to "study to show ourselves approved unto God" if we are to be "workmen that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15). What a fearful word is that in Jeremiah 48:10 [margin]: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently": then let us seek grace to heed this malediction in the preparing of our sermons (or articles) or whatsoever we undertake in the name of our Master. Searching indeed is that declaration of Christ's, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). Not only is the glory of God immediately concerned, but the everlasting weal or woe of immortal souls is involved when we engage in the work of the Lord.

"And he made a trench . . . and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water" (vv. 32-35). How calm and dignified was his manner! There was no haste, no confusion: everything was done "decently and in order." He did not labor under the fear of failure, but was certain of the outcome. Some have wondered where so much water could be obtained after three years' drought, but it must be remembered that the sea was near by, and doubtless it was from it the water was brought—twelve barrels in all, again corresponding to the number of Israel's tribes!

Before passing on, let us pause and behold here the strength of the prophet's faith in the power and goodness of his God. The pouring of so much water upon the altar, the flooding of the offering and the wood beneath it, would make it appear utterly impracticable and unlikely for any fire to consume it. Elijah was determined that the Divine interposition should be the more convincing and illustrious. He was so sure of God that he feared not to heap difficulties in His way, knowing that there can be no difficulty unto One who is omniscient and omnipotent. The more unlikely the answer was, the more glorified therein would be his Master. O wondrous faith which can laugh at impossibilities, which can even increase them so as to have the joy of seeing God vanquish them! It is the bold and venturesome faith which He delights to honor. Alas, how little of this we now behold. Truly this is a day of "small things." Yea, it is a day when unbelief abounds. Unbelief is appalled by difficulties, and schemes to remove them, as though God needed any help from us!

"And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near" (v. 36). By waiting until the hour when "the evening sacrifice" was offered (in the temple), Elijah acknowledged his fellowship with the worshippers at Jerusalem. And is there not a lesson in this for many of the Lord's people in this dark day? Living in isolated places, cut off from the means of grace, yet they should recall the hour of the weekly preaching-service, and the prayer-meeting, and at the same hour draw near unto the Throne of Grace and mingle their petitions with those of their brethren away yonder in the church of their youth. It is our holy privilege to have and maintain spiritual communion with saints when bodily contact with them is no longer possible. So, too, may the sick and the aged, though deprived of public ordinances, thus join the general chorus of praise and thanksgiving. Especially should we attend to this duty and enjoy this privilege during the hours of the Lord's Day.

"And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near." But something else, something deeper, something more precious was denoted by Elijah's waiting until that particular time. That "evening sacrifice" which was offered every day in the temple at Jerusalem, three hours before sunset, pointed forward to the antitypical burnt offering, which was to be slain when the fulness of time should come. Relying on that great sacrifice for the sins of God's people which the Messiah would offer at His appearing on earth, his servant now took his place by an altar which pointed forward to the Cross. Elijah, as well as Moses, had an intense interest in that great sacrifice, as was clear from the fact that they "spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" when they appeared and talked with Christ on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:30, 31). It was his faith depending upon, not the blood of a bullock, but the blood of Christ, that Elijah now presented his petitions unto God.

"And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near": that is, unto the altar which he had built and on which he had laid the sacrifice. Yea, "came near," though expecting an answer by fire! Yet not in the least afraid. Again we say, what holy confidence in God! Elijah was fully assured that the One whom he served, whom he was now honoring, would not hurt him. Ah, his long sojourn at the brook Cherith and the lengthy days spent in his upper room in the widow's house at Zarephath had not been wasted. He had improved the time by spending it in the secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, and there he had learned precious lessons which none of the schools of men can impart. Fellow minister, suffer us to point out that power from God in public ordinances can only be acquired by drawing upon the power of God in private. Holy boldness before the people must be obtained by prostration of soul at the footstool of mercy in the secret place.

"And said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel" (v. 36). This was far more than a reference to the ancestors of his people or the founders of his nation. It was something more than either a patriotic or sentimental utterance. It gave further evidence of the strength of his faith and made manifest the ground upon which it rested. It was the owning of Jehovah as the covenant God of His people, and who as such had promised never to forsake them. The Lord had entered into solemn covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7, 8), which he had renewed with Isaac and Jacob. To that covenant the Lord made reference when He appeared unto Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6 and cf. 2:24). When Israel was oppressed by the Syrians in the days of Jehoahaz we are told that, "The Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion upon them, and had respect unto them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (2 Kings 13:23). Elijah's acting faith on the covenant in the hearing of the people reminded them of the foundation of their hope and blessing. O what a difference it makes when we are able to plead "the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20).

"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel" (v. 36). This was Elijah's first petition, and mark well the nature of it, for it makes clearly manifest his own character. The heart of the prophet was filled with a burning zeal for the glory of God. He could not bear to think of those wrecked altars and martyred prophets. He could not tolerate the land being defiled with the God-insulting and soul-destroying idolatry of the heathen. It was not himself that he cared about, but the horrible fact that the people of Israel were entertaining the idea that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had abdicated in favor of Baal. His spirit was stirred to its depths as he contemplated how blatantly and grievously Jehovah was dishonored. O that we were more deeply moved by the languishing state of Christ's cause upon earth today, by the inroads of the enemy and the awful desolation he has wrought in Zion! Alas that a spirit of indifference, or at least of fatalistic stoicism, is freezing so many of us.

The chief burden of Elijah's prayer was that God should vindicate Himself that day, that He would make known His mighty power, that He would turn the people's heart back unto Himself. It is only when we can look beyond personal interests and plead for the glory of God that we reach the place where He will not deny us. Alas, we are so anxious about the success of our work, the prosperity of our church or denomination, that we lose sight of the infinitely more wonderful matter of the vindication and honor of our Master. Is it any wonder that our circle enjoys so little of God's blessing? Our blessed Redeemer has set us a better example: "I seek not Mine own glory" (John 8: 50), declared that One who was "meek and lowly in heart." "Father, glorify Thy name" (John 12:28), was the controlling desire of His heart. When longing for His disciples to bear fruit, it was that "herein is My Father glorified" (John 15:8). "I have glorified Thee on the earth" (John 17:4), said the Son at the completion of His mission. And now He declares, "whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

"Let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant," How blessed to behold this man, by whose word the windows of heaven were closed, at whose prayers the dead was restored to life, before whom even the king quailed—how blessed, we say, to see him taking such a place before God. "Let it be known . . . that I am thy servant." It was the subordinate place, the lowly place, the place where he was under orders. A "servant" is one whose will is entirely surrendered to another, whose personal interests are completely subservient to those of his master, whose desire and joy it is to please and honor the one who employs him. And this was the attitude and habitude (habitual behavior) of Elijah: he was completely yielded unto God, seeking His glory and not his own. "Christian service" is not doing something for Christ, it is doing those things which He has appointed and assigned us.

Fellow ministers, is this our character? Are our wills so surrendered to God that we can truly say, "I am Thy servant?" But note another thing here. "Let it be known that . . . I am Thy servant": own me as such by the manifestation of Thy power. It is not enough that the minister of the Gospel be God's servant, it must be made manifest that he is such. How? By his separation from the world, by his devotedness to his Master, by his love for and care of souls, by his untiring

labors, his self-denial and self-sacrifice, by spending himself and being spent in ministering to others; and, by the Lord's seal on his ministry. "By their fruits ye shall know them": by the holiness of their character and conduct, by the working of God's Spirit in and through them, by the walk of those who sit under their ministry. How we need to pray, "Let it be known that I am Thy servant."

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**The people gathered were of the 10 tribes of Israel so why did Elijah build the altar with 12 stones?**

**What is the meaning of flooding the sacrifice and wood with water before the fire came down from heaven?**

**What did the evening sacrifice point forward to in the burnt offering?**

In 1 Kings 18:36 Elijah said: "let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things at Your word." **What does it mean to be God's "servant."**

John 8:50      John 12:28      John 14:13      John 15:8      John 17:4

### **1 Kings 18:37**

At the close of our last section we were occupied with the prayer offered by Elijah on Mount Carmel. This supplication of the prophet requires to be examined attentively, for it was a prevalent one, securing a miraculous answer. There are two chief reasons why so many of the prayers of God's people are unavailing: first, because they fail to meet the requirements of acceptable prayer; second, because their supplications are unscriptural, not patterned after the prayers recorded in Holy Writ. It would take us too far afield to enter into full detail as to what requirements we must meet and what conditions have to be fulfilled by us in order to obtain the ear of God, so that He will show Himself strong on our behalf; yet we feel this is a suitable place to say something on this highly important and most practical subject, and at least mention some of the principal requirements for success at the throne of grace.

Prayer is one of the outstanding privileges of the Christian life. It is the appointed means for experimental access to God, for the soul to draw nigh unto its Maker, for the Christian to have spiritual communion with his Redeemer. It is the channel through which we are to seek all needed supplies of spiritual grace and temporal mercies. It is the avenue through which we are to make known our need unto the Most High and look for Him to minister to the same. It is the channel through which faith ascends to Heaven and in response thereto miracle descends to earth. But if that channel be choked, those supplies are withheld; if faith be dormant, miracles do not take place. Of old, God had to say of His people, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). And is it any different today? Again He declared, "Your sins have withholden good things from you" (Jer. 5:25). And is not this the case with most of us now? Have we not occasion to acknowledge, "We have transgressed and have rebelled: Thou hast not pardoned. Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through" (Lam. 3:42, 44). Sad, sad, indeed when such be the case.

If the professing Christian supposes that, no matter what the character of his walk may be, he has but to plead the name of Christ and his petitions are assured of an answer, he is sadly deluded. God is ineffably holy, and His Word expressly declares, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). It is not sufficient to believe in Christ, or plead His name, in order to ensure answers to prayer: there must be practical subjection to and daily fellowship with Him: "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). It is not sufficient to be a child of God and call upon our heavenly Father: there must be an ordering of our lives according to His revealed will: "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). It is not sufficient to come boldly unto the throne of grace: we must "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water," (Heb. 10:22)—that which defiles being removed by the cleansing precepts of the Word, see Ps. 119:9.

Apply the principles briefly alluded to above and mark how those requirements were met and those conditions fulfilled in the case of Elijah. He had walked in strict separation from the evil which abounded in Israel, refusing to compromise or have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. In a day of spiritual degeneracy and apostasy he had maintained personal communion with the Holy One, as his "The Lord God of Israel . . . before whom I stand, (1 Kings 17:1), clearly attested. He walked in practical subjection to God, as his refusing to move until the "word of the Lord came unto him" (17:8), bore definite witness. His life was ordered by the revealed will of his Master, as was manifested by his obedience to the Divine command to dwell with a widow woman in Zarephath. He shrank not from discharging the most unpleasant duties, as was plain from his prompt compliance with the divine order, "Go, show thyself to Ahab" (18:1). And such a one had the ear of God, had power with God.

Now, if what has just been pointed out serves to explain the prevalency of Elijah's intercession, does it not (alas) also furnish the reason why so many of us have not the ear of God, have not power with Him in prayer? It is "the effectual



fervent prayer of a righteous man" which "availeth much" with God (Jas. 5:16), and that signifies something more than a man to whom the righteousness of Christ has been imputed. Let it be duly noted that this statement occurs not in Romans (where the legal benefits of the atonement are chiefly in view), but in James, where the practical and experimental side of the Gospel is unfolded. The "righteous man" in James 5:16 (as also throughout the book of Proverbs, and likewise the "just") is one who is right with God practically in his daily life, whose ways, "please the Lord." If we walk not in separation from the world, if we deny not self, strive not against sin, mortify not our lusts, but gratify our carnal nature, is there any wonder that our prayer-life is cold and formal and our petitions unanswered?

In examining the prayer of Elijah on Mount Carmel we have seen that, first, at the time of the evening sacrifice "the prophet came near": that is, unto the altar on which the slain bullock lay: "came near," though expecting an answer by fire! There we behold his holy confidence in God, and are shown the foundation on which his confidence rested, namely, an atoning sacrifice. Second, we have heard him addressing Jehovah as the covenant God of His people: "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel." Third, we have pondered his first petition: "Let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel," that is, that He would vindicate his honor and glorify His own great name. The heart of the prophet was filled with a burning zeal for the living God and he could not endure the sight of the land being filled with idolatry. Fourth, "and that I am Thy servant," whose will is entirely surrendered to Thee, whose interests are wholly subordinated to Thine. Own me as such by a display of Thy mighty power.

These are the elements, dear reader, which enter into the prayer which is acceptable to God and which meets with a response from Him. There must be more than going through the motions of devotion: there must be an actual drawing near of the soul unto the living God, and for that, there must be a putting away and forsaking of all that is offensive to Him. It is sin which alienates the heart from Him, which keeps the conscience at a guilty distance from Him; and that sin must needs be repented of and confessed if access is to be ours again. What we are now inculcating is not legalistic; we are insisting upon the claims of divine holiness. Christ has not died in order to purchase for His people an indulgence for them to live in sin: rather did He shed His precious blood to redeem them from all iniquity and "purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14), and just so far as they neglect those good works will they fail to enter experimentally into the benefits of His redemption.

But in order for an erring and sinful creature to draw near the thrice Holy One with any measure of humble confidence, he must know something of the relation which he sustains unto Him, not by nature but by grace. It is the blessed privilege of the believer—no matter how great a failure he feels himself to be (provided he is sincere in mourning his failures and honest in his endeavors to please his Lord)—to remind himself that he is approaching One in covenant relationship with him, yea, to plead that covenant before Him. David—despite all his falls—acknowledged "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5), and so may the reader if he grieves over sins as David did, confesses them as contritely, and has the same pantings of heart after holiness. It makes a world of difference in our praying when we can "take hold of God's covenant," assured of our personal interest in it. When we plead the fulfillment of covenant promises (Jer. 32:40, 41; Heb. 10:16, 17), for example, we present a reason God will not reject, for He cannot deny Himself.

Still another thing is essential if our prayers are to meet with the divine approval: the motive prompting them and the petition itself must alike be right. It is at this point so many fail: as it is written, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jas. 4:3). Not so was it with Elijah: it was not his own advancement or aggrandizement he sought, but the magnifying of his Master, and vindication of His holiness, which had been so dishonored by His people's turning aside to Baal worship. We all need to test ourselves here: if the motive behind our praying proceeds from nothing higher than self, we must expect to be denied. Only when we truly ask for that which will promote God's glory, do we ask aright. "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14), and we ask "according to His will" when we make request for what will bring honor and praise to the Giver. Alas, how carnal much of our "praying" is!

Finally, if our prayers are to be acceptable to God they must issue from those who can truthfully declare, "I am Thy servant"—one submissive to the authority of another, one who takes the place of subordination, one who is under the orders of his master, one who has no will of his own, one whose constant aim is to please his master and promote his interests. And surely the Christian will make no demur against this. Is not this the very place into which his illustrious Redeemer entered? Did not the Lord of glory take upon Him "the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7), and conduct Himself as such all the days of His flesh? If we maintain our servant character when we approach the throne of grace we shall be preserved from the blatant irreverence which characterizes not a little so-called "praying" of today. In place of making demands or speaking to God as though we were His equals, we shall humbly present our "requests." And what are the main things a "servant" desires? A knowledge of what his master requires, and needed supplies so that his orders may be carried out.

"And that I have done all these things at Thy word" (1 Kings 18:36). "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I have done all these things at Thy word." This was advanced by the prophet as an additional; plea: that God would send down fire from heaven in answer to his supplications, as an attestation of his fidelity to his Master's will. It was in response to Divine orders that the prophet had restrained rain from the earth, had now convened Israel and the false prophets together, and had suggested an open trial or contest, that by a

visible sign from heaven it might be known who was the true God. All this he had done not of himself, but by direction from above. It adds great force to our petitions when we are able to plead before God our faithfulness to His commands. Said David to the Lord, "Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept Thy testimonies," and again, "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame" (Ps. 119:22, 31). For a servant to act without orders from his master is self-will and presumption.

God's commands "are not grievous" (to those whose wills are surrendered to Him), and "in keeping of them there is great reward"! (Ps. 19:11)—in this life as well as in the next, as every obedient soul discovers for himself. The Lord has declared, "them that honor Me, I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30), and He is faithful in making good His promises. The way to honor Him is to walk in His precepts. This is what Elijah had done, and now he counted upon Jehovah honoring him by granting this petition. When the servant of God has the testimony of a good conscience and the witness of the Spirit that he is acting according to the Divine will, he may rightly feel himself to be invincible—that men, circumstances, and Satanic opposition, are of no more account than the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. God's Word shall not return unto Him void: His purpose shall be accomplished though heaven and earth pass away. This, too, was what filled Elijah with calm assurance in that crucial hour. God would not mock one who had been true to Him.

"Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God" (v. 37). How those words breathed forth the intensity and vehemency of the prophet's zeal for the Lord of hosts. No mere formal lip service was this, but real supplication, fervent supplication. This repetition intimates how truly and how deeply Elijah's heart was burdened. He could not endure the dishonor done to his Master on every side: he yearned to see Him vindicate himself. "Hear me, O Lord, hear me," was the earnest cry of a pent-up soul. How his zeal and intensity puts to shame the coldness of our prayers! It is only the genuine cry of a burdened heart that reaches the ear of God. It is "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man" that "availeth much." Oh, what need we have to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit, for He alone can inspire real prayer within us.

"That this people may know that Thou art the Lord God." Here was the supreme longing of Elijah's soul: that it might be openly and incontrovertibly demonstrated that Jehovah, and not Baal or any idol, was the true God. That which dominated the prophet's heart was a yearning that God would be glorified. And is it not thus with all His genuine servants? They are willing to endure any hardships, glad to spend themselves and be spent, if so be that their Lord is magnified. "For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13): how many since the apostle have actually died in His service and for the praise of His holy name! Such, too, is the deepest and most constant desire of each Christian who is not in a backslidden condition: all his petitions issued from and center in this—that God may be glorified. They have, in their measure, drunk of the spirit of their Redeemer: "Father, glorify thy son, that Thy son also may glorify Thee" (John 17:1): when such is the motive behind our petition it is certain of an answer.

"And that Thou hast turned their heart back again" (v. 37)—back from wandering after forbidden objects unto Thyself, back from Baal to the service and worship of the true and living God. Next to the glory of his Master, the deliverance of Israel from the deceits of Satan was the deepest longing of Elijah's heart. He was no selfish and self-centered individual who was indifferent to the fate of his fellows: rather was he anxious that they should have for their portion and supreme good that which so fully satisfied his own soul. And again we say, is not the same thing true of all genuine servants and saints of God? Next to the glory of their Lord, that which lies nearest their hearts and forms the constant subject of their prayers is the salvation of sinners that they may be turned from their evil and foolish ways unto God. Note well the two words we place in italics: "that *Thou* hast turned their *hearts* back again"—nothing short of the heart being turned unto God will avail anything for eternity, and nothing short of God's putting forth His mighty power can effect this change.

Having considered in detail and at some length each petition in Elijah's prevailing prayer, let us call attention to one other feature which marked it, and that is its noticeable brevity. It occupies but two verses in our Bibles and contains only sixty-three words in the English translation: still fewer in the original Hebrew. What a contrast is this from the long-drawn-out and wearisome prayers in many pulpits today! "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl. 5:2). Such a verse as this appears to have no weight with the majority of ministers. One of the marks of the scribes and Pharisees was, that they "for a pretense (to impress the people with their piety) make long prayers" (Mark 12:40). We would not overlook the fact that when the Spirit's unction is enjoyed, the servant of Christ may be granted much liberty to pour out his heart at length, yet his is the exception rather than the rule, as God's Word clearly proves.

One of the many evils engendered by lengthy prayers in the pulpit is the discouraging of simple souls in the pew: they are apt to conclude that if their private devotions are not sustained at length, then the Lord must be withholding from them the spirit of prayer. If any of our readers be distressed because of this, we would ask them to make a study of the prayers recorded in Holy Writ—in Old and New Testaments alike—and they will find that almost all of them are exceedingly short ones. The prayers which brought such remarkable responses from Heaven were like this one of Elijah's: brief and to the point, fervent but definite. No soul is heard because of the multitude of his words, but only when his petitions come from the heart, are prompted by a longing for God's glory, and are presented in childlike faith. The Lord mercifully preserve us from hypocrisy and formality, and make us feel our deep need of crying to Him, "Teach us (not how to, but) to pray."

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

## **What is the test to show our prayers will be met by divine approval?**

Jer. 32:40-41

Heb. 10:16-17

Jam. 4:3

1 John 5:14

### **1 Kings 18:38-40**

Now we turn to and consider the remarkable sequel to the beautiful but simple prayer of Elijah. And again we would say to the reader, let us attempt to visualize the scene, and as far as we can, take our place on Carmel. Cast your eye over the vast concourse of people there assembled. View the large company of the now exhausted and defeated priests of Baal. Then seek to catch the closing words of the Tishbite's prayer: "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:37). What an awful moment follows! What intense eagerness on the part of the assembled multitude to behold the issue! What breathless silence must there have been! What shall be the outcome? Will the servant of Jehovah be baffled as had been the prophets of Baal? If no answer follow, if no fire come down from Heaven, then the Lord is no more entitled to be regarded as God than Baal. Then all that Elijah had done, all his testimony to his Master being the only true and living God, would be looked upon as a delusion. Solemn, intensely solemn moment!

But the short prayer of Elijah had scarcely ended when we are told, "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench" (v. 38). By that fire the Lord avouched Himself to be the only true God, and by it He bore witness to the fact that Elijah was His prophet and Israel His people. Oh, the amazing condescension of the Most High in repeatedly making demonstration of the most evident truths concerning His being, perfections, the Divine authority of His Word, and the nature of His worship. Nothing is more wonderful than this, unless it be the perverseness of men who reject such repeated demonstrations. How gracious of God to furnish such proofs and make all doubting utterly unreasonable and excuseless! Those who receive the teachings of Holy Writ without a question are not credulous fools, for so far from following cunningly devised fables, they accept the unimpeachable testimony of those who were the eye-witnesses of the most stupendous miracles. The Christian's faith rests upon a foundation that need not fear the closest investigation.

"Then the fire of the Lord fell." That this was no ordinary but rather supernatural fire was plainly evident from the effects of it. It descended from above. Then it consumed the pieces of the sacrifice, and then the wood on which they had been laid—this order making it clear that it was not by means of the wood the flesh of the bullock was burnt. Even the twelve stones of the altar were consumed, to make it further manifest this was no common fire. As though that were not sufficient attestation of the extraordinary nature of this fire, it consumed "the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench," thus making it quite obvious that this was a fire whose agency nothing could resist. In each instance the action of this fire was downwards, which is contrary to the nature of all earthly fire. No trickery was at work here, but a supernatural power that removed every ground of suspicion in the spectators, leaving them face to face with the might and majesty of Him they had so grievously slighted.

"Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice." Exceedingly blessed, yet unspeakably solemn was this. First, this remarkable incident should encourage weak Christians to put their trust in God, to go forth in His strength to meet the gravest dangers, to face the fiercest enemies, and to undertake the most arduous and hazardous tasks to which He may call them. If our confidence be fully placed in the Lord Himself, he will not fail us. He will stand by us, though no others do; He will deliver us out of the hands of those who seek our hurt; He will put to confusion those who set themselves against us; and He will honor us in the sight of those who have slandered or reproached us. Look not on the frowning faces of worldlings, O trembling believer, but fix the eye of faith upon Him who has all power in heaven and in earth. Be not discouraged because you meet with so few who are like-minded, but console yourself with the grand fact that if God be for us it matters not who is against us.

How this incident should cheer and strengthen the tried servants of God! Satan may be telling you that compromise is the only wise and safe policy in such a degenerate day as this. He may be moving you to ask yourself the question, What is to become of me and my family if I persevere in preaching what is so unpopular? Then recall the case of the apostle, and how he was supported by the Lord in the most trying circumstances. Referring to his being called upon by that monster Nero to vindicate his conduct as a servant of Christ, he says, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me: that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Tim. 4:16-18). And the Lord has not changed! Put yourself unreservedly in His hands, seek only His glory, and He will not fail you. Trust Him fully as to the outcome, and He will not put you to confusion, as this writer has fully proved.

How blessedly this incident exemplifies the power of faith and the efficacy of prayer. We have already said quite a little upon the prayer offered by Elijah on this momentous occasion, but let us call attention to one other essential feature that marked it, and which must mark our prayers if they are to call down responses from Heaven. "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29), is one of the principles which regulates God's dealings with us. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). Why? Because faith has to do directly with God: it brings Him into

the scene, it puts Him upon His faithfulness, laying hold of His promises and saying, "Do as Thou hast said" (2 Sam. 7:25). If you want to see some of the marvels and miracles which faith can bring to pass, read slowly through Hebrews 11.

And prayer is the principal channel through which faith is to operate. To pray without faith is to insult and mock God. It is written, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick" (Jas. 5:15). But what is it to pray in faith? It is for the mind to be regulated and the heart to be affected by what God has said to us: it is a laying hold of His Word and then counting upon Him to fulfill His promises. This is what Elijah had done, as is plain from his "I have done all these things at Thy word" (v. 36). Some of those things appeared utterly contrary to carnal reason—such as his venturing into the presence of the man who sought his life and ordering him to convene a vast assembly on Carmel, his pitting himself against the hundreds of false prophets, his pouring water on the sacrifice and the wood; nevertheless, he acted on God's Word and trusted Him as to the outcome. Nor did God put him to confusion: He honored his faith and answered his prayer.

Once again we would remind the reader: this incident is recorded for our learning and for our encouragement. The Lord God is the same today as He was then—ready to show Himself strong on the behalf of those who walk as Elijah and trust Him as he did. Are you faced with some difficult situation, some pressing emergency, some sore trial? Then place it not between yourself and God, but rather put God between it and you. Meditate afresh on His wondrous perfections and infinite sufficiency; ponder His precious promises which exactly suit your case; beg the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith and call it into action. So too with God's servants: if they are to accomplish great things in the name of their Master, if they are to put to confusion His enemies and gain the victory over those who oppose, if they are to be instrumental in turning the hearts of men back to God, then they must look to Him to work in and by them, they must rely on His almighty power both to protect and carry them fully through the discharge of arduous duties. They must have a single eye to God's glory in what they undertake, and give themselves to believing and fervent prayer.

"Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice." As we have said above, this was not only exceedingly blessed, but also unspeakably solemn. This will be the more evident if we call to mind those awful words: "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:19). How rarely is this text quoted, and more rarely still is it preached upon! The pulpit often declares that "God is love," but maintains a guilty silence upon the equally true fact that He is "a consuming fire." God is ineffably holy, and therefore does His pure nature burn against sin. God is inexorably righteous, and therefore He will visit upon every transgression and disobedience "a just recompense of reward" (Heb. 2:2). "Fools make a mock at sin" (Prov. 14:9), but they shall yet discover that they cannot mock God with impunity. They may defy His authority and trample upon His laws in this life, but in the next they shall curse themselves for their madness. In this world God deals mercifully and patiently with His enemies, but in the world to come they shall find out to their eternal undoing that He is "a consuming fire."

There upon Mount Carmel God made public demonstration of the solemn fact that He is "a consuming fire." For years past He had been grievously dishonored, His worship being supplanted by that of Baal; but here before the assembled multitude He vindicated His holiness. That fire which descended from heaven in response to the earnest supplication of Elijah was a divine judgment: it was the execution of the sentence of God's outraged Law. God has sworn that "the soul that sinneth it shall die," and He will not belie (give a false impression) Himself. Sin's wages must be paid, either to the sinner himself or to an innocent substitute, which takes his place and endures his penalty. Side by side with the moral law there was the ceremonial law given unto Israel, in which provision was made whereby mercy could be shown the transgressor and yet at the same time the claims of divine justice be satisfied. An animal, without spot or blemish, was slain in the sinner's stead. Thus it was here on Carmel: "The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice," and so the idolatrous Israelites were spared.

O what a wondrous and marvelous scene is presented to us here on Mount Carmel! A holy God must deal with all sin by the fire of His judgment. And here was a guilty nation steeped in evil which God must judge. Must then the fire of the Lord fall immediately upon and consume that disobedient and guilty people? Was no escape possible? Yea, blessed be God, it was. An innocent victim was provided, a sacrifice to represent that sin-laden nation. On it the fire fell, consuming it, and the people were spared. What a marvelous foreshadowing was that of what took place almost a thousand years later upon another mount, even Calvary. There the Lamb of God substituted himself in the place of His guilty people, bearing their sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). There the Lord Jesus Christ suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring them to God. There He was made a curse (Gal. 3:13), that eternal blessing might be their portion. There "the fire of the Lord" fell upon His sacred head, and so intense was its heat, He cried "I thirst."

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God," (v. 39). "They could no longer doubt the existence and the omnipotence of Jehovah. There could be no deception as to the reality of the miracle: they saw with their own eyes the fire come down from heaven and consume the sacrifice. And whether they had respect to the greatness of the miracle itself, or to the fact of its having been foretold by Elijah and wrought for a special purpose; or whether they contemplated the occasion as being one worthy of the extraordinary interposition of the supreme Being, viz., to recover His people who had been seduced into apostasy by the influence of those who were in authority, and to prove himself to be the God of their fathers; all these things combined to demonstrate its divine Author and to establish the commission of Elijah" (John Simpson).

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, 'The Lord, He is the God.'" The Lord is known by His ways and works: He is described as "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." Thus the controversy

was settled between Jehovah and Baal. But the children of Israel soon forgot what they had seen and—like their fathers who had witnessed the plagues upon Egypt and the overthrow of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea—they soon relapsed into idolatry. Awful displays of the Divine justice may terrify and convince the sinner, may extort confessions and resolutions, and even dispose to many acts of obedience, while the impression lasts: but something more is needed to change his heart and convert his soul. The miracles wrought by Christ left the Jewish nation still opposed to the truth: there must be a supernatural work within him for man to be born again.

"And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there" (v. 40). Very solemn is this: Elijah had not prayed for the false prophets (but for "this people"), and the sacrificed bullock availed not for them. So too with the atonement: Christ died for His people, "the Israel of God," and shed not His blood for reprobates. God has caused this blessed truth—now almost universally denied—to be illustrated in the types as well as expressed definitely in the doctrinal portions of His Word. The paschal lamb was appointed for and gave shelter to the Hebrews, but none was provided for the Egyptians! And, my reader, unless your name is written in the Lamb's book of life there is not the slightest ray of hope for you.

There are those actuated by false notions of liberality, who condemn Elijah for his slaying of Baal's prophets, but they err greatly, being ignorant of the character of God and the teachings of his Word. False prophets and false priests are the greatest enemies a nation can have, for they bring both temporal and spiritual evils upon it, destroying not only the bodies but the souls of men. To have permitted those prophets of Baal an escape would have licensed them as the agents of apostasy, and exposed Israel to further corruption. It must be remembered that the nation of Israel was under the direct government of Jehovah, and to tolerate in their midst those who seduced His people into idolatry, was to harbor men who were guilty of high treason against the majesty of heaven. Only by their destruction could the insult to Jehovah be avenged and His holiness vindicated.

Degenerate times call for witnesses who have in view the glory of God and are not swayed by sentimentality, who are uncompromising in dealing with evil. Those who consider Elijah carried his sternness to an extreme length, and imagine he acted in ruthless cruelty by laying the false prophets, know not Elijah's God. The Lord is glorious in holiness, and He never acts more gloriously than when He is "a consuming fire" to the workers of iniquity. But Elijah was only a man! True, yet he was the Lord's servant, under bonds to carry out His orders, and in slaying these false prophets he did what God's Word required: (see Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20, 22). Under the Christian dispensation we must not slay those who have deceived others into idolatry, for "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Cor. 10:4). The application to us today is this: we must unsparingly judge whatever is evil in our lives and shelter in our hearts no rivals to the Lord our God—"let not one of them escape!"

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

#### **In what ways will God be a consuming fire unto unbelievers?**

Matt. 13:41-42    2 Thess. 1:8-9    Heb. 12:29    Rev. 20:15

#### **What will be the result of a believer's work being tested by fire?**

1 Cor. 3:11-15

#### **Was Elijah justified in putting the prophets of Baal to death?**

#### **1 Kings 18:41**

Not a little is said in the Scriptures about rain, yet is such teaching quite unknown today even to the vast majority of people in Christendom. In this atheistic and materialistic age God is not only not accorded his proper place in the hearts and lives of the people, but He is banished from their thoughts and virtually excluded from the world which He has made. His ordering of the seasons, His control of the elements, His regulating of the weather, is now believed by none save an insignificant remnant who are regarded as fools and fanatics. There is need then for the servants of Jehovah to set forth the relation which the living God sustains to His creation and His superintendence of and government over all the affairs of earth, to point out first that the Most High foreordained in eternity past all which comes to pass here below, and then to declare that He is now executing His predetermination and working "all things after the counsel of His own will."

That God's foreordination reaches to material things as well as spiritual, that it embraces the elements of earth as well as the souls of men, is clearly revealed in Holy Writ. "He made a decree (the same Hebrew word as in Ps. 2:7) for the rain" (Job 28:26)—predestinating when, where and how little or how much it should rain: just as "he gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment," (Prov. 8:29), and He hath "placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail" (Jer. 5:22). The precise number, duration and quantity of the showers have been eternally and unalterably fixed by the divine will, and the exact bounds of each ocean and river expressly determined by the fiat (order) of the Ruler of heaven and earth. In accordance with His foreordination we read the God "prepareth rain for the earth" (Ps. 147:8). "I will cause it to rain" (Gen. 7:4), says the King of the firmament, nor can any of His creatures say Him nay. "I will give you rain

in due season" (Lev. 26:4), is His gracious promise, yet how little is its fulfillment recognized or appreciated. On the other hand, He declares "I have withholden the rain from you . . . I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered" (Amos 4:7 and cf. Deut. 11:17); and again, "I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain" (Isa. 5:6), and all the scientists in the world are powerless to reverse it. And therefore does He require of us, "Ask ye of the Lord rain" (Zech. 10:1), that our dependence upon Him may be acknowledged.

What has been pointed out above receives striking and convincing demonstration in the part of Israel's history which we have been considering. For the space of three and a half years there had been no rain or dew upon the land of Samaria, and that was the result neither of chance nor blind fate, but a divine judgment upon a people who had forsaken Jehovah for false gods. In surveying the drought-stricken country from the heights of Carmel it would have been difficult to recognize that garden of the Lord which had been depicted as "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it" (Deut. 8:7-9). But it had also been announced, "And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of thy land *power and dust*" (Deut. 28:23, 24). That terrible curse had been literally inflicted, and therein we may behold the horrible consequences of sin. God endures with much longsuffering the waywardness of a nation as He does of an individual, but when both leaders and people apostatize and set up idols in the place which belongs to Himself alone, sooner or later He makes it unmistakably evident that He will not be mocked with impunity, and "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" become their portion.

Alas that those nations which are favored with the light of God's Word are so slow to learn this salutary lesson: it seems that the hard school of experience is the only teacher. The Lord had fulfilled His awful threat by Moses and had made good His word through Elijah (1 Kings 17:1). Nor could that fearful judgment be removed till the people at least avowedly owned Jehovah as the true God. As we pointed out at the close of a previous section, till the people were brought back into their allegiance to God no favor could be expected from Him; and in another section, neither Ahab nor his subjects were yet in any fit state of soul to be made the recipients of his blessings and mercies. God had been dealing with them in judgment for their awful sins, and thus far His rod had not been acknowledged, nor had the occasion of His displeasure been removed.

But the wonderful miracle wrought on Carmel had entirely changed the face of things. When the fire fell from heaven in answer to Elijah's prayer, all the people "fell on their faces, and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God," And when Elijah ordered them to arrest the false prophets of Baal and to let not one of them escape, they promptly complied with his orders, nor did they or the king offer any resistance when the Tishbite brought them down to the brook Kishon and slew them there (1 Kings 18:39, 40). Thus was the evil put away from them and the way opened for God's outward blessing. He graciously accepted this as their reformation and accordingly removed His scourge from them. This is ever the order: judgment prepares the way for blessing; the awful fire is followed by the welcome rain. Once a people take their place on their faces and render to God the homage which is His due, it will not be long ere refreshing showers are sent down from heaven.

As Elijah acted the part of executioner to the prophets of Baal who had been the principal agents in the national revolt against God, Ahab must have stood by, a most unwilling spectator of that fearful deed of vengeance, not daring to resist the popular outburst of indignation or attempting to protect the men whom he had introduced and supported. And now their bodies lay in ghastly death before his eyes on the banks of the Kishon. When the last of Baal's prophets had bitten the dust, the intrepid Tishbite turned to the king and said, "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain" (1 Kings 18:41). What a load would his words lift from the heart of the guilty king! He must have been greatly alarmed as he stood helplessly by, watching the slaughter of his prophets, tremblingly expecting some terrible sentence to be pronounced upon him by the One whom he had so openly despised and blatantly insulted. Instead, he is allowed to depart unharmed from the place of execution; nay, bidden to go and refresh himself.

How well Elijah knew the man he was dealing with! He did not bid him humble himself beneath the mighty hand of God, and publicly confess his wickedness, still less did he invite the king to join him in returning thanks for the wondrous and gracious miracle which he had witnessed. Eating and drinking was all this Satan-blinded sot (stupefied by excessive drinking) cared about. As another has pointed out, it was as though the servant of the Lord had said, "Get thee up to where thy tents are pitched on yon broad upland sweep. The feast is spread in thy gilded pavilion, thy lackeys await thee; go, feast on thy dainties. But 'be quick' for now that the land is rid of those traitor priests and God is once more enthroned in His rightful place, the showers of rain cannot be longer delayed. Be quick then! Or the rain my interrupt thy carouse (party)." The appointed hour for sealing the king's doom had not yet arrived: meanwhile he is suffered, as a beast, to fatten himself for the slaughter. It is useless to expostulate with apostates; compare John 13:27.

"For there is a sound of abundance of rain." It should scarcely need pointing out that Elijah was not here referring to a natural phenomenon. At the time when he spoke, a cloudless sky appeared as far as the eye could reach, for when the prophet's servant looked out towards the sea for any portent of approaching rain, he declared "there is nothing" (v. 43), and later when he looked a seventh time all that could be seen was "a little cloud." When we are told that Moses "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27), it was not because he beheld God with the natural eye, and when Elijah announced "there is a sound of abundance of rain," that sound was not audible to the outward ear. It was by "the

hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2), that the Tishbite knew the welcome rain was nigh at hand. "The Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7), and the divine revelation now made known to him was received by faith.

While Elijah yet abode with the widow at Zarephath the Lord had said to him, "Go show thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth" (18:1), and the prophet believed that God would do as He had said, and in the verse we are considering he speaks accordingly as if it were now being done, so certain was he that his Master would not fail to make good His word. It is thus that a spiritual and supernatural faith ever works: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It is the nature of this God-given grace to bring distant things close to us: faith looks upon things promised as though they were actually fulfilled. Faith gives a present subsistence to things that are yet future: that is, it realizes them to the mind, giving a reality and substantiality to them. Of the patriarchs it is written, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Heb. 11:13): though the divine promises were not fulfilled in their lifetime, yet the eagle eyes of faith saw them, and it is added they "were persuaded of them and embraced them"—one cannot "embrace" distant objects, true, but faith being so sure of their verity makes them nigh.

"There is a sound of abundance of rain." Does not the reader now perceive the spiritual purport of this language? That "sound" was certainly not heard by Ahab, nor even by any other person in the vast concourse on Mount Carmel. The clouds were not then gathered, yet Elijah hears that which shall be. Ah, if we were more separated from the din of this world, if we were in closer communion with God, our ears would be attuned to His softest whispers: if the Divine Word dwelt in us more richly, and faith was exercised more upon it, we should hear that which is inaudible to the dull comprehension of the carnal mind. Elijah was as sure that promised rain would come as if he now heard its first drops splashing on the rocks or as if he saw it descending in torrents. O that writer and reader may be fully assured of God's promises and embrace them: living on them, walking by faith in them, rejoicing over them, for He is faithful who has promised. Heaven and earth shall pass away before one word of His shall fail.

"So Ahab went up to eat and to drink" (v. 42). The views expressed by the commentators on this statement strike us as being either carnal or forced. Some regard the king's action as being both logical and prudent: having had neither food nor drink since early morning, and the day being now far advanced, he naturally and wisely made for home, that he might break his long fast. But there is a time for everything, and immediately following a most remarkable manifestation of God's power was surely not the season for indulging the flesh. Elijah, too, had had nothing to eat that day, yet he was far from looking after his bodily needs at this moment. Others see in this notice the evidence of a subdued spirit in Ahab: that he was now meekly obeying the prophet's orders. Strange indeed is such a concept: the last thing which characterized the apostate king was submission to God or His servant. The reason why he acquiesced so readily on this occasion was because compliance suited his fleshly appetites and enabled him to gratify his lusts.

"So Ahab went up to eat and to drink." Has not the Holy Spirit rather recorded this detail so as to show us the hardness and insensibility of the king's heart? For three and a half years drought had blighted his dominions and a fearful famine had ensued. Now that he knew rain was about to fall, surely he would turn unto God and return thanks for His mercy. Alas! He had seen the utter vanity of his idols, he had witnessed the exposure of Baal, he had beheld the awful judgment upon his prophets, but no impression was made upon him: he remained obdurate (hard hearted) in his sin. God was not in his thoughts: his one idea was, the rain is coming, so I can enjoy myself without hindrance; therefore, he goes to make merry. While his subjects were suffering the extremities of the divine scourge he cared only to find grass enough to save his stud (18:5), and now that his devoted priests have been slain by the hundreds, he thought only of the banquet which awaited him in his pavilion. Gross and sensual to the last degree, though clad with the royal robes of Israel!

Let it not be supposed that Ahab was exceptional in his sottishness, but rather regard his conduct on this occasion as an illustration and exemplification of the spiritual deadness that is common to all the unregenerate—devoid of any serious thoughts of God, unaffected by the most solemn of His providences or the most wondrous of His works, caring only for the things of time and sense. We have read of Belshazzar and his nobles feasting at the very hour that the deadly Persians were entering the gates of Babylon. We have heard of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning, and even of the royal apartment of Whitehall being filled with a giddy crowd that gave itself up to frivolity while William of Orange was landing at Tor Bay. And we have lived to behold the pleasure-intoxicated masses dancing and carousing while enemy planes were raining death and destruction upon them. Such is fallen human nature in every age: if only they can eat and drink, people act regardless of the judgments of God and are indifferent to their eternal destiny. Is it otherwise with you, my reader? Though preserved outwardly, is there any difference within?

"And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees" (v. 42). Does not this unmistakably confirm what has been said above? How striking the contrast here presented: so far from the prophet desiring the convivial company of the world, he longed to get alone with God; so far from thinking of the needs of his body, he gave himself up to spiritual exercises. The contrast between Elijah and Ahab was not merely one of personal temperament and taste, but was the difference there is between life and death, light and darkness. But that radical antithesis is not always apparent to the eye of man: the regenerate may walk carnally, and the unregenerate can be very respectable and religious. It is the crises of life which reveal the secrets of our hearts and make it manifest whether we are really new creatures in Christ or merely whitewashed worldlings. It is our reaction to the interpositions and judgments of God which brings out what is within us. The children of this world will spend their days in feasting and

their nights in revelry though the world be hastening to destruction; but the children of God will betake themselves to the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

"And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." There are some important lessons here for ministers of the Gospel to take to heart. Elijah did not hang around that he might receive the congratulations of the people upon the successful outcome of his contest with the false prophets, but retired from man to get alone with God. Ahab hastens to his carnal feast, but the Tishbite, like his Lord, has "meat to eat" which others knew not of (John 4:32). Again, Elijah did not conclude that he might relax and take his ease following upon his public ministrations, but desired to thank his Master for His sovereign grace in the miracle He had wrought. The preacher must not think his work is done when the congregation is dismissed: he needs to seek further communion with God, to ask His blessing upon his labors, to praise Him for what He has wrought, and to supplicate Him for further manifestations of His love and mercy.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**Contrast Ahab's reaction to what had happened on Mount Carmel that day to that of Elijah's.**

### **1 Kings 18:42-44**

"And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees" (1 Kings 18:42). We closed our last section by pointing out that this verse sets forth some important lessons which ministers of the Gospel do well to take to heart, the principal of which is the importance and need of their retiring from the scene of their ministry that they may commune with their Lord. When public work is over they need to betake themselves to private work with God. Ministers must not only preach, but pray; not only before and while preparing their sermons, but afterwards. They must not only attend to the souls of their flock, but look after their own souls also, particularly that they may be purged from pride or resting on their own endeavors. Sin enters into and defiles the best of our performances. The faithful servant, no matter how honored of God with success in his work, is conscious of his defects and sees reason for abasing himself before his Master. Moreover, he knows that God alone can give the increase to the seed he has sown, and for that he needs to supplicate the throne of grace.

In the passage which is now to be before us there is most blessed and important instruction not only for ministers of the Gospel but also for the people of God in general. Once again it has pleased the Spirit here to let us into the secrets of prevailing prayer, for it was in that holy exercise the prophet was now engaged. It may be objected that it is not expressly stated in 1 Kings 18:42-46 that Elijah did any praying on this occasion. True, and here is where we discover afresh the vital importance of comparing Scripture with Scripture. In James 5 we are told "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he *prayed again*, and the heaven gave rain" (vv. 17, 18). The latter verse clearly has reference to the incident we are now considering: as truly as the heavens were closed in response to Elijah's prayer, so were they now opened in answer to his supplication. Thus we have before us again the conditions which must be met if our intercessions are to be effectual.

Once more we emphasize the fact that what is recorded in these Old Testament passages is written both for our instruction and consolation (Rom. 15:4), affording as they do invaluable illustrations, typifications and exemplifications of what is stated in the New Testament in the form of doctrine or precept. It might be thought that after so recently devoting almost the whole of two chapters in this book on the life of Elijah to showing the secrets of prevailing intercession there was less need for us to take up the same subject again. But it is a *different aspect* of it which is now in view: in 1 Kings 18:36, 37 we learn how Elijah prayed in *public*, here we behold how he prevailed in *private* prayer, and if we are really to profit from what is said in verses 42-46 we must not skim them hurriedly, but study them closely. Are you anxious to conduct your secret devotions in a manner that will be acceptable to God and which will produce answers of peace? Then attend diligently to the details which follow.

First, this man of God *withdrew* from the crowds and "went up to the top of Carmel." If we would hold audience with the Majesty on high, if we would avail ourselves of that "new and living way" which the Redeemer has consecrated for His people, and "enter into the holiest" (Heb. 10:19, 20), then we must needs retire from the mad and distracting world around us and get alone with God. This was the great lesson laid down in our Lord's first word on the subject before us: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:6). Separation from the godless, and the shutting out of all sights and sounds which take the mind off God is absolutely indispensable. But the entering of the closet and the shutting of its door denotes more than physical isolation: it also signifies the calming of our spirit, the quieting of our feverish flesh, the gathering in of all wandering thoughts, that we may be in a fit frame to draw nigh unto and address the Holy One. "*Be still*, and know that I am God" is His unchanging requirement. How often the *failure* of this "shut door" renders our praying ineffectual! The atmosphere of the world is fatal to the spirit of devotion and we must get alone if communion with God is to be enjoyed.



Second, observe well *the posture* in which we now behold this man of God: "And he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees" (v. 42). Very, very striking is this! As one has put it: "We scarcely recognize him, he seems so to have lost his identity. A few hours before, he stood erect as an oak of Bashan: now he is bowed as a bulrush." As he confronted the assembled multitude, Ahab, and the hundreds of false prophets, he carried himself with majestic mien and becoming dignity; but now he would draw nigh unto the King of kings, the utmost humility and reverence marks his demeanor. There as God's ambassador he had pleaded with Israel, here as Israel's intercessor he is to plead with the Almighty. Facing the forces of Baal he was as bold as a lion; alone with God most high, he hides his face and by his actions owns his nothingness. It has ever been thus with those most favored of Heaven: Abraham declared "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). When Daniel beheld an anticipation of God incarnate, he declared, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption" (Dan. 10:8). The seraphim veil their faces in His presence (Isa. 6:2).

That to which we are now directing attention is greatly needed by this most irreverent and blatant generation. Though so highly favored of God and granted such power in prayer, this did not cause Elijah to take liberties with Him or approach Him with indecent familiarity. No, he bowed his knees before the Most High and placed his head between his knees, betokening his most profound veneration for that infinitely glorious Being whose messenger he was. And if *our* hearts be right, the more we are favored of God the more shall we be humbled by a sense of our unworthiness and insignificance, and we shall deem no posture too lowly to express our respect for the Divine Majesty. We must not forget that though God be our Father He is also our Sovereign, and that while we be His children we are likewise His subjects. If it be an act of infinite condescension on His part for the Almighty even to "*behold* the things which are in heaven and in earth" (Ps. 113:6), then we cannot sufficiently abase ourselves before Him.

How grievously have those words been perverted: "Let us therefore come *boldly* unto the Throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16)! To suppose they give license for us to address the Lord God as though we were His equals is to put darkness for light and evil for good. If we are to obtain the ear of God then we must take our proper place before Him, and that is, in the dust. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" *comes before* "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:6, 7). We must abase ourselves under a sense of our meanness. If Moses was required to remove his shoes ere he approached the burning bush in which the Shekinah glory appeared, we too must conduct ourselves in prayer as befits the majesty and might of the great God. It is true that the Christian is a redeemed man and accepted in the Beloved, yet in himself he is still a *sinner*. As another has pointed out, "The most tender love which casts out the fear that hath torment, begets a fear that is as delicate and sensitive as that of John's, who, though he had laid his head on the bosom of Christ, scrupled too hastily to intrude upon the grave where He had slept."

Third, note particularly that this prayer of Elijah's was *based upon a divine promise*. When commanding his servant to appear again before Ahab, the Lord had expressly declared, "And I will send rain upon the earth" (18:1). Why then, should he now be found earnestly begging Him for rain? To natural reason a divine assurance of anything seems to render asking for it unnecessary: would not God make good His word and send the rain irrespective of further prayer? Not so did Elijah reason: nor should we. So far from God's promises being designed to exempt us from making application to the throne of grace for the blessings guaranteed, they are designed to instruct us what things to ask for, and to encourage us to ask for them believingly, that we may have their fulfillment to *ourselves*. God's thoughts and ways are ever the opposite of ours—and infinitely superior thereto. In Ezekiel 36:24-36 will be found a whole string of promises, yet in immediate connection therewith we read, "I will yet for this be *inquired of* by the house of Israel, *to do it* for them" (v. 37).

By asking for those things which God has promised, we own Him as the Giver, and are taught our dependence upon Him: faith is called into exercise and we appreciate His mercies all the more when they are received. God will do what He undertakes, but He requires us to plead for all which we would have Him do for us. Even to His own beloved Son God says, "Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance" (Ps. 2:8): His reward must be claimed. Even though Elijah heard (by faith) "a sound of abundance of rain," nevertheless he must pray for it (Zech. 10:1). God has appointed that if we would receive, we must ask; that if we would find, we must seek; that if we would have the door of blessing opened, we must knock; and if we fail so to do, we shall prove the truth of those words, "ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jas. 4:2). God's promises then are given us to incite to prayer, to become the mold in which our petitions should be cast, to intimate the extent to which we may expect an answer.

Fourth, his prayer was *definite* or to the point. Scripture says, "Ask ye of the Lord rain" (Zech. 10:1), and for that very thing the prophet asked: he did not generalize but particularized. It is just here that so many fail. Their petitions are so vague they would scarcely recognize an answer if it were given: their requests are so lacking in precision that the next day the petitioner himself finds it difficult to remember what he asked for. No wonder such praying is profitless to the soul, and brings little to pass. Letters which require no answer contain little or nothing in them of any value or importance. Let the reader turn to the four Gospels with this thought before him and observe how very definite in his requests and detailed in describing his case was each one who came to Christ and obtained healing, and remember they are recorded for our learning. When His disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray He said, "Which of you shall have a friend and shall go to him at midnight and say unto him; Friend, lend me three loaves" (Luke 11:5)—not simply "food," but specifically "*three loaves!*"

Fifth, his prayer was *fervent*: "he prayed earnestly" (Jas. 5:17). It is not necessary for a man to shout and scream in order to prove he is in earnest, yet on the other hand cold and formal askings must not expect to meet with any response. God grants our requests only for Christ's sake, nevertheless unless we supplicate Him with warmth and reality, with intensity of spirit and vehemency of entreaty, we shall not obtain the blessing desired. This importunity is constantly inculcated in Scripture, where prayer is likened unto seeking, knocking, crying, striving. Remember how Jacob wrestled with the Lord, and how David panted and poured out his soul. How unlike them is the listless and languid petitioning of most of our moderns! Of our blessed Redeemer it is written that He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7). It is not the half-hearted and mechanical asking which secures an answer, but "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man (that) availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

Sixth, note well Elijah's *watchfulness* in prayer: "And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea" (v. 43). While we are instant in prayer and waiting for an answer, we must be on the look-out to see if there be any token for good. Said the Psalmist, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His Word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning" (Ps. 130:5, 6). The allusion is to those who were stationed on the watch-tower gazing eastward for the first signs of the break of day, that the tidings might be signaled (trumpeted) to the temple, so that the morning sacrifice might be offered right on time. In like manner the suppliant soul is to be on the alert for any sign of the approach of the blessing for which he is praying. "Continue in prayer, *and* watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Alas, how often we fail at this very point, because hope does not hold up the head of our holy desires. We pray, yet do not look out expectantly for the favors we seek. How different was it with Elijah!

Seventh, Elijah's *perseverance* in his supplication. This is the most noticeable feature about the whole transaction and it is one which we need particularly to heed, for it is at this very point most of us fail the worst. "And he said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing." "Nothing": nothing in the sky, nothing arising out of the sea to intimate the approach of rain. Does not both writer and reader know the meaning of this from personal experience? We have sought the Lord, and then hopefully looked for His intervention, but instead of any token from Him that He has heard us, there is "nothing"! And what has been our response? Have we petulantly and unbelievably said, "Just as I thought," and ceased praying about it? If so, that was a wrong attitude to take. First make sure your petition is grounded upon a divine promise, and then believingly wait God's time to fulfil it. If you have no definite promise, commit your case into God's hands and seek to be reconciled to His will as to the outcome.

"And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing." Even Elijah was not always answered *immediately*, and who are we to demand a prompt answer to our first asking? The prophet did not consider that because he had prayed once and there was no response, therefore he need not continue to pray; rather did he persevere in pressing his suit until he received. Such was the persistency of the patriarch Jacob, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26). Such was the Psalmist's mode of praying: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry" (40:1). "And he said, Go again seven times" (v. 43), was the prophet's command to his servant. He was convinced that sooner or later God would grant his request, yet he was persuaded he should "give Him no rest" (Isa. 62:7). Six times the servant returned with his report that there was no portent of rain, yet the prophet relaxed not his supplication. And let us not be faint-hearted when no immediate success attends our praying, but be importunate, exercising faith and patience until the blessing comes.

To ask once, twice, thrice, nay six times, and then be denied, was no slight test of Elijah's endurance, but grace was granted him to bear the trial. "Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you" (Isa. 30:18). Why? To teach us that we are not heard for our fervor or urgency, or because of the justness of our cause: we can claim nothing from God—all is of *grace*, and we must wait *His* time. The Lord waits, not because He is tyrannical, but "that He may be gracious." It is for our good that He waits: that our graces may be developed, that submission to His holy will may be wrought in us; then He lovingly turns to us and says, "Great is thy faith, be it unto thee as thou wilt" (Matthew 15:28). "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him" (John 5:14, 15). God cannot break His own Word, but we must abide His time and, refusing to be discouraged, continue supplicating Him until He appears on our behalf.

"And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand" (v. 44). The prophet's perseverance in prayer had not been in vain, for here was a token from God that he was heard. God does not often give a full answer to prayer all at once, but a little at first and then gradually more and more as He sees that to be good for us. What the believer has now is nothing to what he shall yet have if he continues instant in prayer, believing and earnest prayer. Though God was pleased to keep the prophet waiting for a time, He did not disappoint his expectation, nor will He fail us if we continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving. Then let us be ready to receive with cheerfulness and gratitude the least indication of an answer to our petitions, accepting it as a token for good and an encouragement to persevere in our requests till there be full accomplishment of those desires which are grounded upon the Word. Small beginnings often produce wonderful effects, as the parable of the grain of mustard seed clearly teaches (Matthew 13:31, 32). The feeble efforts of the apostles met with remarkable success as God owned and blessed them. We regard the words, "like a man's hand," as possessing a symbolic meaning: a man's hand had been raised in supplication and had, as it were, left its shadow on the heavens!

"And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not" (v. 44). Elijah did not disdain the significant omen, little though it was, but promptly took encouragement from the same. So convinced was he that the windows of heaven were about to be opened and plentiful showers given that he sent his servant with an urgent message to Ahab, that he should get away at once ere the storm burst and the brook Kishon be so swollen that the king would be prevented from making his journey homeward. What holy confidence in a prayer-hearing God did that display! Faith recognized the Almighty behind that "little cloud." A "handful of meal" had been sufficient under God to sustain a household for many months, and a cloud "like a man's hand" could be counted upon to multiply and furnish an abundant downpour. "And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain" (v. 45). Should not this speak loudly to us? O sorely-tried believer, take heart from what is here recorded: the answer to your prayers may be much nearer than you think.

"And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel" (v. 45). The king had responded promptly to the prophet's message. How much sooner are the ministers of the Lord attended to when giving temporal advice than they are when offering *spiritual* counsel. Ahab had no doubt now that the rain was about to fall. He was satisfied that He who answered Elijah with fire was on the point of answering him with water; nevertheless, his heart remained as steeled against God as ever. O how solemn is the picture here presented: Ahab was convinced but not converted. How many like him there are in the churches today, who have religion in the head but not in the heart: convinced that the Gospel is true, yet rejecting it; assured that Christ is mighty to save, yet not surrendering to Him.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**How is Elijah's method of approaching God similar to that of Abram (Gen. 18:27), Daniel (Dan. 10:8), Habakkuk (Hab. 2:1-4), Zechariah (Zech. 10:1), Jesus (Heb. 5:7), James (Jam. 4:2), and Peter (1 Pet. 5:6).**

### 1 Kings 18:45-19:2

In passing from 1 Kings 18 to 1 Kings 19 we meet with a sudden and strange transition. It is as though the sun was shining brilliantly out of a clear sky and the next moment, without any warning, black clouds drape the heavens and crashes of thunder shake the earth. The contrasts presented by these chapters are sharp and startling. At the close of the one "the hand of the Lord was on Elijah" as he ran before Ahab's chariot: at the beginning of the other he is occupied with self and "went for his life." In the former we behold the prophet at his best: in the latter we see him at his worst. There he was strong in faith and the helper of his people: here he is filled with fear and is the deserter of his nation. In the one he confronts the four hundred prophets of Baal undaunted: in the other he flees panic-stricken from the threats of one woman. From the mountain top he betakes himself into the wilderness, and from supplicating Jehovah that He would vindicate and glorify His great name to begging Him to take away his life. Who would have imagined such a tragic sequel?

In the startling contrasts here presented we have a striking proof of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. In the Bible human nature is painted in its true colors: the characters of its heroes are faithfully depicted, the sins of its noteworthy persons are frankly recorded. True, it is human to err, but equally true it is human to conceal the blemishes of those we most admire. Had the Bible been a human production, written by uninspired historians, they had magnified the virtues of the most illustrious men of their nation, and ignored their vices, or if mentioned at all, glossed over them and made attempts to extenuate the same. Had some human admirer chronicled the history of Elijah, his sad failure would have been omitted. The fact that it is recorded, that no effort is made to excuse it, is evidence that the characters of the Bible are painted in the colors of truth and reality, that they were not sketched by human hands, but that the writers were controlled by the Holy Spirit.

"And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:46). This is most blessed. The "hand of the Lord" is often used in Scripture to denote His power and blessing. Thus Ezra said, "the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy" (8:31); "The hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord (Acts 2:21). This word coming in here points an instructive sequel to what was before us in verse 42: there we beheld the prophet cast down on the earth in self-abasement before God, here we see God honoring and miraculously sustaining His servant—if we would have the power and blessing of God rest upon us, we must take a lowly place before Him. In this instance the "hand of the Lord" communicated supernatural strength and fleetness of foot to the prophet, so that he covered the eighteen miles so swiftly as to overtake and pass the chariot: thus did God further honor the one who had honored Him and at the same time supply Ahab with yet another evidence of Elijah's divine commission. This was illustrative of the Lord's way: where there is a man who takes his place in the dust before the Most High, it will soon be made apparent before others that a power beyond his own energizes him.

"And he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." Each detail contains an important lesson for us. The power of God resting upon Elijah did not render him careless and negligent of his own duty: he gathered up his garment so that his movements might be unimpeded. And if we are to run with patience the race that is set before us we need to "lay aside every weight" (Heb. 12:1). If we are to "stand against the wiles of the Devil" we must

have our "loins girt about with truth" (Eph. 6:14). By running "before Ahab" Elijah took the lowly place of a common footman, which should have shown the monarch that his zeal against idolatry was prompted by no disrespect for himself, but actuated only by jealousy for God. The Lord's people are required to "honor the king" in all civil matters, and here too it is the duty of ministers to set their people an example. Elijah's conduct on this occasion served as another test of Ahab's character: if he had had any respect for the Lord's servant he would have invited him into his chariot, as the eminent Ethiopian did Philip (Acts 8:31), but it was far otherwise with this son of Belial.

Onward sped the wicked king toward Jezreel where his vile consort awaited him. The day must have been a long and trying one for Jezebel, for many hours had passed since her husband had gone forth to meet Elijah at Carmel. The peremptory command he had received from Jehovah's servant to gather all Israel together unto that mount, and the prophets of Baal as well, intimated that the crisis had been reached. She would therefore be most anxious to know how things had gone. Doubtless she cherished the hope that her priests had triumphed, and as the rain clouds blotted out the sky would attribute the welcome change to some grand intervention of Baal in response to their supplications. If so, all was well: her heart's desire would be realized, her scheming crowned with success, the undecided Israelites would be won over to her idolatrous regime and the last vestiges of the worship of Jehovah would be stamped out. For the troublesome famine Elijah was solely to blame; for the ending thereof she and her gods should have the credit. Probably such thoughts as these occupied her mind in the interval of waiting.

And now the suspense is over: the king has arrived and hastens to make report to her. "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword" (19:1). The first thing which strikes us about these words is their noticeable omission: the Lord Himself was left out entirely. Nothing is said of the wonders *He* had wrought that day, how that He had not only caused fire to come down from heaven, and consume the sacrifice, but even the very stones of the altar, and how it had licked up great quantities of water in the trench around it; and how in response to the prayer of His servant, rain was sent in abundance. No, God has no place in the thoughts of the wicked, rather do they put forth their utmost efforts to banish Him from their minds. And even those who, from some form of self-interest, take up with religion, and make a profession and attend the public services, yet to talk of God and His wondrous works with their wives in their *homes*, is one of the last things we should find them doing. With the vast majority of professors, religion is like their Sunday clothes—worn that day and laid by for the rest of the week.

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that *Elijah* had done." As God is not in the thoughts of the wicked so it is the way of unbelief to fix upon secondary causes or attribute unto the human instrument what the Lord is the doer of. It matters not whether He acted in judgment or in blessing, God himself is lost sight of and only the means He employs or the instruments He uses are seen. If a man of insatiable ambition be the divine instrument for chastising nations laden with iniquity, that instrument becomes the object of universal hatred, but there is no humbling of the nations before the One who wields that rod. If a Whitefield or a Spurgeon be raised up to preach the Word with exceptional power and blessing, he is worshipped by the religious masses and men talk of *his* abilities and *his* converts. Thus it was with Ahab: first he ascribed the drought and famine to the prophet—"art thou he that troubleth Israel!" (18:17), instead of perceiving that it was the *Lord* who had a controversy with the guilty nation and that he was the one mainly responsible for its condition; and now he is still occupied with what "Elijah had done."

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done." He would relate how Elijah had mocked her priests, lashed them with his biting irony, and held them up to the scorn of the people. He would describe how he had put them to confusion by his challenge, and how he, as if by some spell or charm, had brought down fire from heaven. He would enlarge upon the victory gained by the Tishbite, of the ecstasy of the people thereon, how they had fallen on their faces, saying, "Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God." That he recounted these things unto Jezebel, not to convince her of her error, but rather to incense her against God's servant, is clear from his designed climax: "and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." How this revealed once more what an awful character Ahab was! As the protracted drought with the resultant famine had not turned him unto the Lord, so this divine mercy of sending the rain to refresh his dominions led him not to repentance. Neither divine judgments nor divine blessings will of themselves reclaim the unregenerate nothing but a miracle of sovereign grace can turn souls from the power of sin and Satan unto the living God.

It is not difficult to imagine the effect which would be produced upon the haughty, domineering and ferocious Jezebel when she heard Ahab's report: it would so hurt her pride and fire her furious temper that nothing but the speedy dispatch of the object of her resentment could pacify it. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time" (v. 2). If Ahab's heart was unaffected by what had transpired on Carmel, remaining steeled against God, still less was his heathen consort softened thereby. He was sensual and materialistic, caring little about religious matters: so long as he had plenty to eat and drink, and his horses and mules were cared for, he was content. But Jezebel was of a different type, as resolute as he was weak. Crafty, unscrupulous, merciless, Ahab was but a tool in her hands, fulfilling her pleasure, and therein, as Revelation 2:20 intimates, she was a foreshadowing of the woman riding the scarlet-colored beast (Rev. 17:3). The crisis was one of gravest moment. Policy as well as indignation prompted her to act at once. If this national reformation were permitted to develop it would overthrow what she had worked for years to establish.

"So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them (her slain prophets) by tomorrow." Behold the implacable and horrible enmity against God of a soul that has been abandoned by Him. Utterly incorrigible, her heart was quite insensible of the divine presence and power. Behold how that awful hatred expressed

itself: unable to hurt Jehovah directly, her malice vents itself on His servant. It has ever been thus with those whom God has given up to a reprobate mind. Plague after plague was sent upon Egypt, yet so far from Pharaoh throwing down his weapons of rebellion, after the Lord brought His people out with a high hand, that wretch declared. "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them" (Ex. 15:9). When the Jewish council beheld Stephen and "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel," irradiated with heavenly glory, instead of receiving his message when they heard his words "they were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth," and like so many raging maniacs "cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him" (Acts 7:54-58).

Beware of resisting God and rejecting His Word, lest you be abandoned by Him and He suffers your madness to hasten your destruction. The more it was manifest that God was with Elijah, the more was Jezebel exasperated against him. Now that she learned he had slain her priests, she was like a lioness robbed of her cubs. Her rage knew no bounds; Elijah must be slain at once. Boastful of the morrow, swearing by her gods, she pronounced a fearful imprecation upon herself if Elijah does not meet the same end. The resolution of Jezebel shows the extreme hardness of her heart. It solemnly illustrates how wickedness grows on people. Sinners do not reach such fearful heights of defiance in a moment, but as conscience resists convictions, as light is again and again rejected, the very things which should soften and humble come to harden and make more insolent, and the more plainly God's will be set before us, the more will it work resentment in the mind and hostility in the heart; then it is but a short time until that soul is consigned to the everlasting burnings.

But see here *the overruling hand of God*. Instead of ordering her officers to slay the prophet forthwith, Jezebel sent a servant to announce her sentence upon him. How often mad passions defeat their own ends, fury blinding the judgment so that prudence and caution are not exercised. Possibly she felt so sure of her prey that she feared not to announce her purpose. But future events lie not at the disposal of the sons of men, no matter what positions of worldly power be occupied by them. Probably she thought that Elijah was so courageous, there was no likelihood of his attempting an escape: but in this she erred. How often God takes "the wise in their own craftiness" (Job 5:13), and defeats the counsels of the wicked Ahithophels (2 Sam. 15:31)! Herod had murderous designs on the infant Savior, but "being warned of God in a dream," His parents carried Him down to Egypt (Matthew 2:12). The Jews "took counsel" to kill the apostle Paul, but "their laying wait was known to him" and the disciples delivered him out of their hands (Acts 9:23). So here: Elijah is given warning before Jezebel wreaks her vengeance on him.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

### **How does Jezebel foreshadow the woman riding on the scarlet-colored beast in Revelation 17:3-6?**

#### **1 Kings 19:3**

This brings us to the saddest part of the narrative. The Tishbite is notified of the queen's determination to slay him: what was his response thereto? He was the Lord's servant, does he then look unto his Master for instructions? Again and again we have seen in the past how "the Word of the Lord came" to him (17:2, 8; 18:1), telling him what to do: will he now wait upon the Lord for the necessary guidance? Alas, instead of spreading his case before God, he takes matters into his own hands; instead of waiting patiently for Him, he acts on hasty impulse, deserts the post of duty, and flees from the one who sought his destruction. "And when he saw that, he arose and went for his life, and came to Beersheba which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there" (v. 3). Notice carefully the "*when he saw*, he arose and went for his life." His eyes were fixed on the wicked and furious queen: his mind was occupied with her power and fury, and therefore his heart was filled with terror. Faith in God is the only deliverer from carnal fear: "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid"; "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee," (Isa. 12:2; 26:3). Elijah's mind was no longer stayed upon Jehovah, and therefore fear took possession of him.

Hitherto Elijah had been sustained by faith's vision of the living God, but now he lost sight of the Lord and saw only a furious woman. How many solemn warnings are recorded in Scripture of the disastrous consequences of walking by sight. "Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere" (Gen. 13:10), and made choice thereof: but very shortly after it is recorded of him that he "pitched his tent toward Sodom!" The majority-report of the twelve men sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan was, "we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; and we were in our own *sight* as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). In consequence of which "all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night." Walking by sight magnifies difficulties and paralyzes spiritual activity. It was when Peter "saw the wind boisterous" that "he was afraid and began to sink" (Matthew 14:30). How striking the contrast between Elijah here and Moses, who "*By faith* forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27), and nothing but the eye of faith fixed steadily upon God will enable anyone to "endure."

"And when he saw that, he arose, and went for *his life*"—not for God, nor for the good of His people; but because he thought only of self. The man who had faced the four hundred and fifty false prophets, now fled from one woman; the man who hitherto had been so faithful in the Lord's service now deserted his post of duty, and that at a time when his

presence was most needed by the people, if their convictions were to be strengthened and the work of reformation carried forward and firmly established. Alas, what is man! As Peter's courage failed him in the presence of the maid, so Elijah's strength wilted before the threatenings of Jezebel. Shall we exclaim, "How are the mighty fallen!"? No, indeed, for that would be a carnal and erroneous conception. The truth is that "It is only as God vouchsafes His grace and Holy Spirit that any man can walk uprightly. Elijah's conduct on this occasion shows that the spirit and courage he had previously manifested were of the Lord, and not of himself: and that those who have the greatest zeal and courage for God and His truth, if left to themselves, become weak and timorous" (John Gill).

The lot of God's people is a varied one and their case is marked by frequent change. We cannot expect that it should be otherwise while they are left in this scene, for there is nothing stable here: mutability and fluctuation characterizes everything under the sun. Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward, and the common experience of saints is no exception to this general rule. "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33), Christ plainly warned His disciples: yet He added, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," and therefore ye shall share in My victory. Yet though victory be sure, they suffer many defeats along the way. They do not enjoy unbroken summer in their souls; nor is it always winter with them. Their voyage across the sea of life is similar to that encountered by mariners on the ocean: "They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. . . Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses" (Ps. 107:26, 28).

Nor is it any otherwise with God's public servants. True, they enjoy many privileges which are not shared by the rank and file of the Lord's people, and for these they must yet render an account. Ministers of the Gospel do not have to spend most of their time and strength amid the ungodly, toiling for their daily bread; instead they are shielded from constant contact with the wicked, and much of their time may be and should be spent in quiet study, meditation and prayer. Moreover, God has bestowed special spiritual gifts on them: a larger measure of His Spirit, a deeper insight into His Word, and therefore they should be better fitted to cope with the trials of life. Nevertheless, "tribulation" is also their portion while left in this wilderness of sin. Indwelling corruptions give them no rest day or night and the Devil makes them the special objects of his malice, ever busy seeking to disturb their peace and impair their usefulness, venting upon them the full fury of his hatred.

More may rightly be expected from the minister of the Gospel than from others. He is required to be "an example of the believers in word, in conversation (behavior), in charity (love), in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12); "in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity" (Titus 2:7). But though a "man of God," he is a "man" and not an angel, compassed with infirmity and prone to evil. God has placed His treasure in "earthen vessels"—not steel or gold—easily cracked and marred, worthless in themselves: "that" adds the apostle, "the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7): that is, the glorious Gospel proclaimed by ministers is no invention of *their* brains, and the blessed effects which it produces are in no wise due to *their* skill. They are but instruments, weak and valueless in themselves; their message is God-given and its fruits are entirely of the Holy Spirit, so that they have no ground whatever for self-glorification, nor have those who are benefited by their labors any reason to make heroes out of them or look up to them as a superior order of beings, who are to be regarded as little gods.

The Lord is very jealous of His honor and will not share His glory with another. His people profess to believe that as a cardinal truth, yet they are apt to forget it. They, too, are human, and prone to hero-worship, prone to idolatry, prone to render unto the creatures that to which the Lord alone is entitled. Hence it is they so frequently meet with disappointment, and discover their beloved idol is, like themselves, made of clay. For his own people, God has chosen "the foolish things of this world," the "weak things," the "base things" and "things which are not" (mere "nobody's"), "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:27-29). And he has called sinful though regenerated men, and not holy angels, to be the preachers of His Gospel, that it might fully appear that "the excellency of the power" in calling sinners out of darkness into His marvelous light lies not in them nor proceeds from them, but that He alone gives the increase to the seed sown by them: "so then neither is he that planteth (the evangelist) anything, neither he that watereth (the teacher), but God" (1 Cor. 3:7).

It is for this reason that God suffers it to appear that the best of men are but men at the best. No matter how richly gifted they may be, how eminent in God's service, how greatly honored and used of Him, let His sustaining power be withdrawn from them for a moment and it will quickly be seen that they *are* "earthen vessels." No man stands any longer than he is supported by divine grace. The most experienced saint, if left to himself, is immediately seen to be as weak as water and as timid as a mouse. "Man at his best estate is altogether vanity" (Ps. 39:5). Then why should it be thought a thing incredible when we read of the failings and falls of the most favored of God's saints and servants? Noah's drunkenness, Lot's carnality, Abraham's prevarications, Moses' anger, Aaron's jealousy, Joshua's haste, David's adultery, Jonah's disobedience, Peter's denial, Paul's contention with Barnabas, are so many illustrations of the solemn truth that "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20). Perfection is found in Heaven, but nowhere on earth except in the Perfect Man.

Yet let it be pointed out that the failures of these men are not recorded in Scripture for us to hide behind, as though we may use them to excuse our own infidelities. Far from it: they are set before us as so many danger signals for us to take note of, as solemn warnings for us to heed. The reading thereof should humble us, making us more distrustful of ourselves. They should impress upon our hearts the fact that our strength is found alone in the Lord, and that without Him we can do nothing. They should be translated into earnest prayer that the workings of pride and self-sufficiency may be

subdued within us. They should cause us to cry constantly, "Hold *Thou* me up, and I shall be safe" (Ps. 119:117). Not only so, they should wean us from undue confidence in the creatures and deliver us from expecting too much of others, even of the fathers in Israel. They should make us diligent in prayer for our brethren in Christ, especially for our pastors, that it may please God to preserve them from everything which would dishonor His name and cause His enemies to rejoice.

The man at whose prayers the windows of heaven had been fast closed for three and a half years, and at whose supplication they had again been opened, was no exception: he too was made of flesh and blood, and this was permitted to be painfully manifest. Jezebel sent a message to inform him that on the morrow he should suffer the same fate as had overtaken her prophets. "And when he saw that, he arose and went for his life." In the midst of his glorious triumph over the enemies of the Lord, at the very time the people needed him to lead them in the total overthrow of idolatry and the establishment of true worship, he is terrified by the queen's threat, and flees. It was "the hand of the Lord" which had brought him to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:46), and he received no divine intimation to move from there. Surely it was both his privilege and duty to look unto his Master to protect him from Jezebel's rage as He had before done from Ahab's. Had he committed himself into the hands of God *He* had not failed him and great good had probably been accomplished if he now remained at the post where the Lord had put him.

But his eyes were no longer fixed upon God, instead they saw only a furious woman. The One who had miraculously fed him at the brook Cherith, who had so wondrously sustained him at the widow's home in Zarephath, and who so signally strengthened him on Carmel, is forgotten. Thinking only of himself he flees from the place of testimony. But how is this strange lapse to be accounted for? Obviously his fears were excited by the queen's threat coming to him so *unexpectedly*. Was there not good reason for him now to be anticipating with great joy and exultation the cooperation of all Israel in the work of reformation? Would not the whole nation, who had cried, "Jehovah, He is the God," be deeply thankful for his prayers having procured the much-needed rain? And in a moment his hope seemed to be rudely shattered by this message from the incensed queen. Had he then lost all faith in God to protect him? Far be it from us so to charge him: rather does it seem that he was momentarily overwhelmed, panic-stricken. He gave himself no time to think: but taken completely by surprise, he acted on the spur of the moment. How that gives point to "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16).

While what has been pointed out above accounts for Elijah's hurried action, yet it does not explain his strange lapse. It was the absence of faith which caused him to be filled with fear. But let it be stated that the exercise of faith lies not at the disposal of the believer, so that he may call it into action whenever he pleases. Not so: faith is a divine gift and the exercise of it is solely by divine power, and both in its bestowment and its operations God acts sovereignly. Yet though God ever acts sovereignly, He never acts capriciously. He afflicts not willingly, but because we give Him occasion to use the rod; He withholds grace because of our pride, withdraws comfort because of our sins. God permits His people to experience falls along the road for various reasons, yet in every instance the outward fall is preceded by some failure or other on their part, and if we are to reap the full benefit from the recorded sins of such as Abraham, David, Elijah and Peter, we need to study attentively what led up to and was the occasion of them. This is generally done with Peter's case, yet rarely so with the others.

In most instances the preceding contexts give plain intimation of the first signs of declension, as a spirit of self-confidence signally marked the approaching fall of Peter. But in the case before us the previous verses supply no clue to the eclipse of Elijah's faith, yet the verses which follow indicate the cause of his relapse. When the Lord appeared unto him and asked, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (19:9), the prophet answered, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away." Does not that tell us, first, that he had been entertaining too great a regard of his own importance; second, that he was unduly occupied with his service: "I, even I only am left"—to maintain Thy cause; and third, that he was chagrined at the absence of those results he had expected? The workings of pride—his three fold "I"—choke the exercises of faith. Observe how Elijah repeated those statements (v. 14), and how God's response seems by His very corrective to specify the disease—Elisha was appointed in his stead!

God then withdrew His strength for the moment that Elijah might be seen in his native weakness. He did so righteously, for grace is promised only to the humble (Jas. 4:6). Yet in this God acts sovereignly, for it is only by His grace that any man is kept humble. He gives more faith to one than to another, and maintains it more evenly in certain individuals. How great the contrast from Elijah's flight was Elisha's faith: when the king of Syria sent a great host to arrest the latter and his servant said, "Alas, my master! How shall we do?" the prophet answered, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:15, 16). When the Empress Eudoxia sent a threatening message to Chrysostom, he bade her officer, "Go tell her I fear nothing but sin." When the friends of Luther earnestly begged him not to proceed to the Diet of Worms to which he had been summoned by the Emperor, he replied, "Though every tile on the houses of that city were a devil I will not be deterred," and he went, and God delivered him out of his enemies' hands. Yet the infirmities of Chrysostom and Luther were manifested on other occasions.

It was his being occupied with circumstances which brought about Elijah's sad fall. It is a dictum of the world's philosophy that "man is the creature of his circumstances." No doubt this is largely the case with the natural man, but it should not be true of the Christian, nor is it so while his graces remain in a healthy condition. Faith views the One who orders our circumstances, hope looks beyond the present scene, patience gives strength to endure trials, and love

delights in Him whom no circumstances affect. While Elijah set the Lord before him he feared not though a host encamped against him. But when he looked upon the creature and contemplated his peril he thought more of his own safety than of God's cause. To be occupied with circumstances is to walk by sight, and that is fatal both to our peace and spiritual prosperity. However unpleasant or desperate be our circumstances, God is able to preserve us in them, as He did Daniel in the lion's den and his companions in the fiery furnace; yea, He is able to make the heart triumph over them, as witness the singing of the apostles in the Philippian dungeon.

Oh, what need have we to cry, "Lord, increase our faith," for we are only strong and safe while exercising faith in God. If He be forgotten and His presence with us be not realized at the time when great dangers menace us, then we are certain to act in a manner unworthy of our Christian profession. It is by faith we stand (2 Cor. 1:24), as it is through faith we are kept by the power of God unto salvation (1 Pet. 1:5). If we truly set the Lord before us and contemplate Him as being at our right hand, nothing will move us, none can make us afraid; we may bid defiance to the most powerful and malignant. Yet as another has said, "But where is the faith that never staggers through unbelief? The hand that never hangs down, the knee that never trembles, the heart that never faints?" Nevertheless, the fault is *ours*, the blame is ours. Though it lies not in our power to strengthen faith or call it into exercise, we may weaken it and can hinder its operations. After saying, "Thou standest by faith," the apostle at once added, "Be not high-minded, but fear" (Rom. 11:20)—be distrustful of self, for it is pride and self-sufficiency which stifle the breathings of faith.

Many have thought it strange when they read of the most noble worthy of Biblical saints failing in the very graces which were their strongest. Abraham is outstanding for his faith, being called "the father of all them that believe"; yet his faith broke down in Egypt when he lied to Pharaoh about his wife. We are told that "Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3), yet he was debarred from entering Canaan because he lost his temper and spoke unadvisedly with his lips. John was the apostle of love, yet in a fit of intolerance he and his brother James wanted to call down fire from heaven so that the Samaritans be destroyed, for which the Savior rebuked them (Luke 9:54, 55). Elijah was renowned for his boldness, yet it was his courage which now failed him. What proofs are these that none can exercise those graces which most distinguish their characters without the immediate and constant assistance of God, and that, when in danger of being exalted above measure, they are often left to struggle with temptation without their accustomed support. Only by conscious and acknowledged weakness are we made strong.

A few words only must suffice in making application of this sad incident. Its outstanding lesson is obviously a solemn warning unto those occupying public positions in the Lord's vineyard. When He is pleased to work through and by them there is sure to be bitter and powerful opposition stirred up against them. Said the apostle, "A great and effectual door is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9)—the two ever go together; yet if the Lord be our confidence and strength, there is nothing to fear. A heavy and well nigh fatal blow had been given to Satan's kingdom that day on Carmel, and had Elijah stood his ground, would not the seven thousand secret worshippers of Jehovah have been emboldened to come forth on his side, the language of Micah 4:6 and 7, been accomplished, and the captivity and dispersion of his people spared? Alas, one false step and such a bright prospect was dashed to the ground, and never returned. Seek grace, O servant of God, to "withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

But does not this sad incident also point a salutary lesson which *all* believers need take to heart? This solemn fall of the prophet comes also immediately after the marvels which had been accomplished in response to his supplications. How strange! Rather, how searching! In the preceding sections we emphasized that the glorious transactions wrought upon Mount Carmel supply the Lord's people with a most blessed illustration and demonstration of the efficacy of prayer, and surely this pathetic sequel shows what need they have to be on their guard when they have received some notable mercy from the Throne of Grace. If it was needful that the apostle should be given a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be "exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations" vouchsafed him (2 Cor. 12:7), then what need have we to "rejoice *with trembling*" (Ps. 2:11), when we are elated over receiving answers to our petitions.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

#### **What was the cause of Elijah's fear and why did his faith fail?**

1 Kings 19:10, 14    Ps. 2:11    Isa. 12:2    Isa. 26:3    Rom. 11:20    2 Cor. 5:7    2 Cor. 12:7

#### **Did the exercise of faith lie at Elijah's as well as our disposal and if so why?**

Gal. 2:20    Eph. 5:22

#### **1 Kings 19:4**

We are now to behold the effects which Elijah's giving way to fear had upon him. The message which had come from Jezebel, that on the morrow she would take revenge upon him for his slaying of her prophets, rendered the Tishbite panic-stricken. For the moment God saw fit to leave him to himself, that we might learn the strongest are weak as water when He withholds His support, as the powerful Samson was as impotent as any other man as soon as the Spirit of the Lord departed from him. It matters not what growth has been made in grace, how well experienced we may be in the spiritual



life, or how eminent the position we have occupied in the Lord's service, when *He* withdraws His sustaining hand the madness which is in our hearts by nature at once asserts itself, gains the upper hand, and leads us into a course of folly. Thus it was now with Elijah. Instead of taking the angry queen's threat unto the Lord and begging Him to undertake, he took matters into his own hands and "went for his life" (1 Kings 19:3).

In the preceding chapter we intimated why it was that the Lord suffered His servant to experience a lapse at this time: in addition to what was there said we believe the prophet's flight was a *punishment on Israel*, for the insincerity and inconstancy of their reformation. "One would have expected after such a public and sensible manifestation of the glory of God, and such a clear decision of the contest pending between him and Baal, to the honor of Elijah, the confusion of Baal's prophets, and the universal satisfaction of the people, after they had seen both fire and water come from heaven at the prayer of Elijah, and both in mercy to them: the one as a sign of the acceptance of their offering, the other as it refreshed their inheritance, that they should now all as one man have returned to the worship of the God of Israel and taken Elijah for their guide and oracle, that he should henceforth have been their prime minister of state and his directions laws both to king and kingdom. But it is quite otherwise: he is neglected whom God honored; no respect is paid to him nor any use made of him; on the contrary, the land of Israel to which he had been and might yet have been a great blessing, is soon made too hot for him" (Matthew Henry). His departure from Israel was a judgment upon them.

In the Scriptures God's children are exhorted again and again *not to fear*. "Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid" (Isa. 8:12). But how are weak and trembling souls to render obedience to this precept? The very next verse tells us: "sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself, and let *Him* be your fear, and let Him be your dread." It is the fear of the Lord in our hearts which delivers from the fear of man: the filial awe of displeasing and dishonoring Him who is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. "Be not afraid of their faces," said God to another of His servants, adding, "for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jer. 1:8). Ah, it is the consciousness of His presence which faith must realize if fear is to be stilled. Christ admonished His disciples for their fear: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26). "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (1 Pet. 3:14), is the word which we are required to take to heart.

In connection with Elijah's flight from Jezebel we are told first that he "came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah" (1 Kings 19:3). There it might be thought a safe asylum would be secured, for he was now outside the territory governed by Ahab, but it was only a case (as the old saying goes) of "jumping out of the frying pan into the fire." For at that time the kingdom of Judah was ruled over by Jehoshaphat, and his son had married "the daughter of Ahab" (2 Kings 8:18), and so closely were the two houses of Jehoshaphat and Ahab united that when the former was asked to join the latter in an expedition against Ramoth-gilead, Jehoshaphat declared, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses" (1 Kings 22:4). Thus Jehoshaphat would have had no compunction in delivering up the one who had fled to his land as soon as he received command from Ahab and Jezebel to that effect. So tarry in Beersheba Elijah dare not, but flees yet farther.

Beersheba lay towards the extreme south of Judea, being situated in the inheritance of Simeon, and it is estimated that Elijah and his companion covered no less than ninety miles in their journey thither from Jezreel. Next we are told that he "left his servant there." Here we behold the prophet's thoughtfulness and compassion for his lone retainer: anxious to spare him the hardships of the dreary wilderness of Arabia, which he now proposed to enter. In this considerate act the prophet sets an example for masters to follow, who should not require their dependents to encounter unreasonable perils nor perform services above their strength. Moreover, Elijah now wished to be alone with his trouble and not give vent to his feelings of despair in the presence of another. This, too, is worthy of emulation: when fear and unbelief fill his heart and he is on the point of giving expression to his dejection, the Christian should retire from the presence of others lest he infect them with his morbidity and petulance—let him unburden his heart to *the Lord*, and spare the feelings of his brethren.

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness" (v. 4). Here we are given to see another effect of fear and unbelief: it produces perturbation and agitation, so that a spirit of restlessness seizes the soul. And how can it be otherwise? Rest of soul is to be found nowhere but in the Lord, by communing with and confiding in Him. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Isa. 57:20): necessarily so, for they are utter strangers to the Rest-Giver—"the way of peace have they not known" (Rom. 3:17). When the Christian is out of fellowship with God, when he takes matters into his own hands, when faith and hope are no longer in exercise, his case is no better than that of the unregenerate, for he has cut himself off from his comforts and is thoroughly miserable. Contentment and delighting in the Lord's will is no longer his portion: instead, his mind is in a turmoil, he is thoroughly demoralized, and now vainly seeks to find relief in a ceaseless round of diversions and the feverish activities of the flesh. He must be on the move, for he is completely discomposed: he wearies himself in vain exercises, till his natural strength gives out.

Follow the prophet with your mind's eye. Hour after hour he plods along beneath the burning sun, his feet blistered by the scorching sands, alone in the dreary desert. At last fatigue and anguish overcame his sinewy strength and he "came and sat under a juniper tree and requested for himself that he might die" (v. 4). The first thing we would note in this connection is that, disheartened and despondent as he was, Elijah made no attempt to lay violent hands on himself. Though now for a season God had withdrawn His comforting presence, and in a measure withheld His restraining grace, yet He did not and never does wholly deliver one of His own into the power of the Devil.

"And he requested for himself that he might die." The second thing we would note is the *inconsistency* of his conduct. The reason why Elijah left Jezreel so hurriedly on hearing of Jezebel's threat was that he "went for his life," and now he

longs that his life might be taken from him. Herein we may perceive still another effect when unbelief and fear possess the heart. Not only do we then act foolishly and wrongly, not only does a spirit of unrest and discontent take possession of us, but we are thrown completely off our balance, the soul loses its poise, and consistency of conduct is at an end. The explanation of this is simple: truth is uniform and harmonious, whereas error is multiform and incongruous; but for the truth to control us effectually *faith* must be in constant exercise—when faith ceases to act we at once become erratic and undependable and, as men speak, we are soon a "bundle of contradictions." Consistency of character and conduct is dependent upon a steady walking with God.

Probably there are few of God's servants but who at some time or other are eager to cast off their harness and cease from the toils of conflict, particularly when their labors seem to be in vain and they are disposed to look upon themselves as cumberers of the ground. When Moses exclaimed, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me," he at once added, "And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand" (Num. 11:14, 15). So, too, Jonah prayed, "Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (4:3). Nor is a longing to be removed from this world of trouble peculiar to the ministers of Christ. Many of the rank and file of His people also are at times moved to say with David, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest" (Ps. 55:6). Short as is our sojourn down here, it seems long, too long for some of us, and though we cannot vindicate Elijah's peevishness and petulance, yet this writer can certainly sympathize with him under the juniper tree, for he has often been there himself.

It should, however, be pointed out that there is a radical difference between desiring to be delivered from a world of disappointment and sorrow and a longing to be delivered from this body of death in order that we may be present with the Lord. The latter was the case with the apostle when he said, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). A desire to be freed from abject poverty or a bed of languishing is only natural, but a yearning to be delivered from a world of iniquity and a body of death so that we may enjoy unclouded communion with the Beloved is truly spiritual. One of the greatest surprises of our own Christian life has been to find how few people give evidence of the latter. The majority of professors appear to be so wedded to this scene, so in love with this life, or so fearful of the physical aspect of death, that they cling to life as tenaciously as do non-professors. Surely Heaven cannot be very real to them. True, we ought submissively to wait God's time, yet that should not preclude or override a desire to "depart, and be with Christ."

But let us not lose sight of the fact that in his dejection Elijah *turned to God* and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers,' (v. 4). No matter how cast down we be, how acute our grief, it is ever the privilege of the believer to unburden his heart unto that One who "sticketh closer than a brother," and pour out our complaint into His sympathetic ear. True, He will not wink at what is wrong, nevertheless He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. True, He will not always grant us our request, for oftentimes we "ask amiss" (Jas. 4:3), yet if He withholds what we desire it is because He has something better for us. Thus it was in the case of Elijah. The Lord did not take away his life from him at that time: He did not do so later, for Elijah was taken to Heaven without seeing death. Elijah is one of the only two who have entered Heaven without passing through the portals of the grave. Nevertheless, for God's chariot Elijah had to wait God's appointed time.

"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." He was tired of the ceaseless opposition which he encountered, weary of the strife. He was disheartened in his labors, which he felt were of no avail. I have striven hard, but it has been in vain; I have toiled all night and caught nothing. It was the language of disappointment and fretfulness: "It is enough"—I am unwilling to fight any longer, I have done and suffered sufficient: let me go hence. We are not sure what he signified by his "I am not better than my fathers." Possibly he was pleading his weakness and incapacity: I am not stronger than they, and no better able to cope with the difficulties they encountered. Perhaps he alluded to the lack of fruit in his ministry: nothing comes of my labors, I am no more successful than they were. Or maybe he was intimating his disappointment because God had not fulfilled his expectations. He was thoroughly despondent and anxious to quit the arena.

See here once more the consequences which follow upon giving way to fear and unbelief. Poor Elijah was now in the slough of despond, an experience which most of the Lord's people have at some time or other. He had forsaken the place into which the Lord had brought him, and now was tasting the bitter effects of a course of self-will. All pleasure had gone out of life: the joy of the Lord was no longer his strength. O what a rod do we make for our backs when we deliberately depart from the path of duty. By leaving the paths of righteousness we cut ourselves off from the springs of spiritual refreshment, and therefore the "wilderness" is now our dwelling-place. And there we sit down in utter dejection alone in our wretchedness, for there is none to comfort us while we are in such a state. Death is now desired that an end may be put to our misery. If we try to pray it is but the murmurings of our hearts which find expression: my will, and not Thine, be done being the substance thereof.

And what was the Lord's response? Did He turn with disgust from such a sight and leave His erring servant to reap what he had sown and suffer the full and final deserts of his unbelief? Ah, shall the good Shepherd refuse to take care of one of His strayed sheep, lying helpless by the wayside? Shall the great Physician refuse assistance to one of His patients just when he needs Him most? Blessed be His name, the Lord is "long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:13). Thus it was here: the Lord evidenced His pity for His overwrought and disconsolate servant in a most gracious manner, for the next

thing that we read of is that he "*slept* under a juniper tree" (v. 5). But the force of that is apt to be lost upon us, in this God-dishonoring day, when there are few left who realize that "*He giveth His beloved sleep*" (Ps. 127:2). It was something better than "nature taking its courses: it was the Lord refreshing the weary prophet.

How often is it now lost sight of that the Lord cares for the bodies of His saints as well as for their souls. This is more or less recognized and owned by believers in the matter of food and clothing, health and strength, but it is widely ignored by many concerning the point we are here treating of. Sleep is as imperative for our physical well-being as is food and drink, and the one is as much the *gift* of our heavenly Father as is the other. We cannot put ourselves to sleep by any effort of will, as those who suffer with insomnia quickly discover. Nor does exercise and manual labor of itself ensure sleep: have you ever lain down almost exhausted and then found you were "too tired to sleep"? Sleep is a divine gift, but the nightly recurrence of it blinds us to the fact.

When it so pleases Him, God withholds sleep, and then we have to say with the Psalmist, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking" (77:4). But that is the exception rather than the rule, and deeply thankful should we be that it is so. Day by day the Lord feeds us, and night-by-night He "giveth His beloved sleep." Thus in this little detail—of Elijah's sleeping under the juniper tree—which we are likely to pass over lightly, we should perceive the gracious hand of God ministering in tenderness to the needs of one who is dear unto Him. Yes, "the Lord pitieth them that fear Him," and why? "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). He is mindful of our frailty, and tempers His winds accordingly; He is aware when our energies are spent, and graciously renews our strength. It was not God's design that His servant should die of exhaustion in the wilderness after his long, long flight from Jezreel, so he mercifully refreshes his body with sleep. And thus compassionately does He deal with us.

Alas, how little are we affected by the Lord's goodness and grace unto us. The unfailing recurrence of His mercies both temporally and spiritually inclines us to take them as a matter of course. So dull of understanding are we, so cold our hearts Godward, it is to be feared that most of the time we fail to realize *whose* loving hand it is which is ministering to us. Is not this the very reason why we do not begin really to value our health until it is taken from us, and not until we spend night after night tossing upon a bed of pain do we perceive the worth of regular sleep with which we were formerly favored? And such vile creatures are we that, when illness and insomnia come upon us, instead of improving the same by repenting of our former ingratitude, and humbly confessing the same to God, we murmur and complain at the hardness of our present lot and wonder what we have done to deserve such treatment. O let those of us who are still blessed with good health and regular sleep fail not daily to return thanks for such privileges and earnestly seek grace to use the strength from them to the glory of God.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**What was God's reaction to Elijah after he prayed: "It is enough! Now Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:4) How does God react to us when we are at wits end?**

1 Kings 19:5-13 Ps. 103:13 Ps. 127:2

### **1 Kings 19:5-6**

"There hath no temptation (trial: whether in the form of seductions or afflictions, solicitations to sin, or hardships) taken you but such as is common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). There hath no trial come upon you but such as human nature is liable unto and has often been subject to: you have not been called upon to experience any super-human or unprecedented temptation. But how generally is this fact lost sight of when the dark clouds of adversity come our way! Then we are inclined to think, none was ever so severely tried as I am. It is well at such a moment to remind ourselves of this truth and ponder the records of those who have gone before us. Is it excruciating suffering of body which causes you to suppose your anguish is beyond that of any other? Then recall the case of Job "with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown"! Is it bereavement, the unexpected snatching away of loved ones? Then remember also that Job lost all his sons and daughters in a single day. Is it a succession of hardships and persecutions encountered in the Lord's service? Then read 2 Corinthians 2:24-27 and note the multiplied and painful experiences through which the chief of the apostles was called upon to pass.

But perhaps that which most overwhelms some reader is *the shame* he feels over his breakdown under trials. He knows that others have been tried as severely as he has, yea, much more severely, yet they bore them with courage and composure, whereas he has been crushed by them: instead of drawing comfort from the divine promises, he has given way to a spirit of despair; instead of bearing the rod meekly and patiently, he has rebelled and murmured; instead of plodding along the path of duty, he has deserted it. Was there ever such a sorry failure as I am? Is now his lament. Rightly should we be humbled and mourn over such failures to quit ourselves "like men" (1 Cor. 16:13) contritely should we confess such sins unto God. Yet we must not imagine that all is now lost. Even this experience is not unparalleled in the lives of others. Though Job cursed not God, yet he did the day of his birth. So, too, did Jeremiah, (20:14). Elijah deserted his post of duty, lay down under the juniper tree and prayed for death. What a mirror is Scripture in which we may see ourselves!

"But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Yes, God is faithful even if we are faithless: He is true to His covenant engagements, and though He visits our iniquities with stripes, yet His loving kindness will He never utterly take from one of His own (Ps. 89:32, 33). It is in the hour of trial, just when the clouds are blackest and a spirit of dejection has seized us, that God's faithfulness appears most conspicuously. He knows our frame and will not suffer us to be unduly tried, but will "with the temptation also make a way to escape." That is to say, He will either lighten the burden or give increased strength to bear it, so that we shall not be utterly overwhelmed by it. "God is faithful": not that He is engaged to secure us if we deliberately plunge into temptations. No, but rather, if we seek to resist temptation, if we call upon Him in the day of trouble, if we plead His promises and count upon Him to undertake for us, He most certainly will not fail us. Thus, though on the one hand we must not presume and be reckless, on the other hand we should not despair and give up the fight.—Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

How strikingly and how blessedly was 1 Corinthians 10:13, illustrated and exemplified in the case of Elijah! It was a sore temptation or trial, when after all his fidelity in the Lord's service his life should be threatened by the wicked Jezebel, and when all his efforts to bring back Israel to the worship of the true God seemed to be entirely in vain. It was more than he could bear: he was weary of such a one-sided and losing fight, and he prayed to be removed from the arena. But God was faithful and with the sore temptation "also made a way to escape" that he might be able to bear it. In Elijah's experience, as is so often the case with us, God did not remove the burden, but He gave fresh supplies of grace so that the prophet could bear it. He neither took away Jezebel nor wrought a mighty work of grace in the hearts of Israel, but He renewed the strength of His overwrought servant. Though Elijah had fled from his post of duty, the Lord did not now desert the prophet in his hour of need. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). O what a God is ours! No mere fair-weather friend is the One who shed his blood to redeem us, but a Brother "born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17). He has solemnly sworn "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," and therefore may we triumphantly declare, "The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5, 6).

As we pointed out in our last section, the first thing which the Lord did in renewing the strength of Elijah was to give His beloved sleep, thereby refreshing his weary and travel-worn body. How inadequately do we value this Divine blessing, not only for the rest it brings to our physical frames but for the relief it affords to a worried mind! What a mercy it is for many harassed souls that they are not awake the full twenty-four hours! Those who are healthy and ambitious may begrudge the hours spent in slumber as so much "necessary waste of time," but others who are wracked with pain or who are distressed must regard a few hours of unconsciousness each night as a great boon. None of us are as grateful as we should be for this constantly recurring privilege, nor as hearty in returning thanks unto its Bestower. That this is one of the Creator's gifts unto us is seen from the very first occurrence of the word in Scripture: "The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam" (Gen. 2:21).

"And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, *behold*, then, an angel touched him" (1 Kings 19:5). Here was the second proof of the Lord's tender care for His servant and an inexpressibly blessed one was it. Each separate word calls for devout attention. "Behold:" a note of wonderment to stimulate our interest and stir us to reverent amazement. "Behold" *what?* Some token of the Lord's displeasure, as we might well expect: a drenching rain for example, to add to the prophet's discomfort? No, far otherwise. Behold a grand demonstration of that truth, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9). These verses are often quoted, yet few of the Lord's people are familiar with the words which immediately precede them and of which they are an amplification: "Let us return to the Lord and He will have mercy upon us, and to our God for He will *abundantly pardon*." Thus it is not the loftiness of his wisdom but the infinitude of his mercy which is there in view.

"Behold *then*." This time-mark gives additional emphasis to the amazing phenomenon which is here spread before our eyes. It was not on the summit of Carmel, but here in the wilderness that Elijah received this touching proof of his Master's care. It was not immediately after his conflict with the prophets of Baal, but following upon his flight from Jezreel that he received this distinguishing favor. It was not while he was engaged in importunate prayer, begging God to supply his need, but when he had petulantly asked that his life should be taken from him, that provision was now made to preserve it. How often God is better to us than our fears. We look for judgment, and behold mercy! Has there not been just such a "then" in our lives? Certainly there has been—more than once in the writer's experience; and we doubt not in each of our Christian reader's. Well, then, may we unite together in acknowledging, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10). Rather has He dealt with us after His covenant faithfulness and according to His knowledge-passing love.

"Behold, then an *angel* touched him." It was not a fellow-traveler whose steps God now directed toward the juniper tree and whose heart He moved to have compassion unto the exhausted one who lay beneath it. That had been a signal mercy, but here we gaze upon something far more amazing. God dispatched one of those celestial creatures who surround His throne on high to comfort the dejected prophet and supply his wants. Verily this was not "after the manner of men," but blessed be His name it was after the manner of Him who is "the God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10). And grace, my reader, takes no account of our worthiness or unworthiness, of our undeservedness, or ill-deservedness. No, grace is free and sovereign and looks not outside itself for the motive of its exercise. Man often deals harshly with his fellows, ignoring their frailty and forgetting that he is liable to fall by the wayside as they are, and therefore he frequently acts

hurriedly, inconsistently, and unkindly towards them. But not so did God: He ever deals patiently with His erring children, and shows the deepest pity and tenderness.

"Behold, then an angel touched him," gently rousing him from his sleep, that he might see and partake of the refreshment which had been provided for him. How this reminds us of that word, "are they not all (the holy angels) ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). This is something about which we hear little in this materialistic and skeptical age, but concerning which the Scriptures reveal much for our comfort. It was an angel who came and delivered Lot from Sodom ere that city was destroyed by fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:15, 16). It was an angel which "shut the lions' mouths" when Daniel was cast into their den (6:22). It was angels who conveyed the soul of the beggar into "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). It was an angel which visited Peter in the prison, smote the chains from his hands, caused the iron gate of the city to "open of his own accord" (Act 12:7, 10), and thus delivered him from his enemies. It was an angel who assured Paul that none on the ship should perish (Acts. 27:23). Nor do we believe for a moment that the ministry of angels is a thing of the past, though they no longer manifest themselves in visible form as in Old Testament times—Hebrews 1:14, precludes such an idea.

"Then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head" (vv. 5, 6). Here was the third provision which the Lord so graciously made for the refreshment of His exhausted servant. Once more we note the thought-provoking "behold." And well may we ponder this sight and be moved to wonderment at it—wonderment at the amazing grace of Elijah's God, and our God. Twice before, the Lord provided sustenance for the prophet in a miraculous manner; by the ravens at the brook Cherith, by the widow woman at Zarephath; but here none less than an angel ministered to him! Behold the *constancy* of God's love, which all Christians profess to believe in but few seem to realize in moments of depression and darkness. As another has said, "It is not difficult to believe that God loves us when we go with the multitude to the house of God with joy and praise and stand in the sunlit circle: but it is hard for us to believe that He feels as much love for us when, exiled by our sin to the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites our soul is cast down within us, and deep calls to deep and His waves and billows surge around.

"It is not difficult to believe that God loves us when, like Elijah at Cherith and Carmel, we do his commandments hearkening unto the voice of His Word; but it is not so easy when, like Elijah in the desert, we lie stranded, or as dismantled and rudderless vessels roll in the trough of the waves. It is not difficult to believe in God's love when, like Peter, we stand on the mount of glory and in the rapture of joy propose to share a tabernacle with Christ for evermore; but it is well-nigh impossible when, with the same apostle, we deny our Master with oaths, and are abashed by a look in which grief masters rebuke." Most necessary is it for our peace and comfort to know and believe that the love of God abides unchanging as Himself. What proof did Elijah here receive of the same! Not only was he not forsaken by the Lord, but there was no upbraiding of him nor word of reproach upon his conduct. Ah, who can fathom, yea even understand, the amazing grace of our God: the more sin abounds the more does His grace superabound!

Not only did Elijah receive unmistakable proof of the constancy of God's love at this time, but it was manifested in a specially tender manner. He had drunk of the brook Cherith, but never of water drawn by angelic hands from the river of God. He had eaten of bread foraged for him by ravens and of meal multiplied by a miracle, but never of cakes manufactured by celestial fingers. And why these *special* proofs of tenderness? Certainly not because God condoned His servant, but because a special manifestation of love was needed to assure the prophet that he was still the object of Divine love, to soften his spirit and lead him to repentance. How this reminds us of that scene portrayed in John 21, where we behold a breakfast prepared by the risen Savior and a fire of coals to warm the wet seamen; and He did this for the very men who, on the night of His betrayal, all forsook Him and fled, and who refused to believe in His triumph when the women told them of the empty tomb and of His appearing unto them in tangible form!

"And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals and a cruse of water at his head." Not only does this "behold" emphasize the riches of God's grace in ministering to His wayward servant, but it also calls attention to a marvel of His power. In their petulance and unbelief, Israel of old had asked, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (Ps. 78:19); yea, they affirmed, "It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14:12). And here was Elijah, not merely on the fringe of this desolate and barren wilderness but "a day's journey" into its interior. Nothing grew there save a few shrubs, and no stream moistened its parched sands. But adverse circumstances and unpropitious conditions present no obstacles to the Almighty. Though means be wanting to us, the lack of them presents no difficulty to the Creator; He can produce water from the flinty rock and turn stones into bread. Therefore no good thing shall they lack whom the Lord God has engaged to provide for: His mercy and His power are equally pledged on their behalf. Remember then, O doubting one, the God of Elijah still lives and whether thy lot be cast in a time of war or famine, thy bread and thy water are sure.

"And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head." There is yet another direction to which this "behold" points us, which seems to have escaped the notice of the commentators, namely, the kind of service which the angel here performed. What an amazing thing that so dignified a creature should be engaged in such a lowly task: that the fingers of a celestial being should be employed in preparing and baking a cake! It would appear a degrading task for one of those exalted beings which surround the throne of the Most High to minister unto one who belonged to an inferior and fallen race, who was undutiful and out of temper: to leave a spiritual occupation to prepare food for Elijah's body—how abasing! Well may we marvel at such a sight, and admire the angel's obedience in

complying with his Master's order. But more, it should encourage us to heed that precept and "condescend to men of low estate" (Rom. 12:16), to regard no employment beneath us by which we may benefit a fellow creature who is dejected in mind and whose spirit is overwhelmed within him. Despise not the most menial duty when an angel disdained not to cook food for a sinful man.

"And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again" (v. 6). Once again it is evident that these narratives of Holy Writ are drawn by an impartial hand and are painted in the colors of truth and reality. The Holy Spirit has depicted the conduct of men, even of the most eminent, not as it should have been but as it actually was. That is why we find our own path and experiences therein so accurately depicted. Had some religious idealist invented the story, *how had he portrayed* Elijah's response to this amazing display of the Lord's grace, of the constancy of His love, and of the special tenderness now shown him? Why obviously he would have pictured the prophet as overwhelmed by such divine favor, thoroughly melted by such loving kindness, and prostrated before Him in adoring worship. How different the Spirit's description of fact! There is no intimation that the petulant prophet was moved at heart, no mention of his bowing in worship, not so much as a word that he returned thanks: merely that he ate and drank and laid himself down again.

Alas, what is man? What is the best of men looked at apart from Christ? How does the maturest saint act the moment the Holy Spirit suspends His operations and ceases to work in and through him? Not differently from the unregenerate, for the flesh is no better in him than in the former. When he is out of communion with God, when his will has been crossed, he is as peevish as a spoiled child. He is no longer capable of appreciating divine mercies, because he considers himself hardly dealt with, and instead of expressing gratitude for temporal favors he accepts them as a matter of course. If the reader feels we are putting an unwarranted construction on this silence of the narrative, that we should not assume Elijah failed to return thanks, we would ask him to read the sequel and ascertain whether or not it shows that the prophet *continued* in a fretful mood. The omission of Elijah's worship and giving thanks for the refreshment is only too sadly true to life. How this should rebuke us for similar omissions! How this absence of praise should remind us of *our* ingratitude at Divine favors when our wills are crossed, and humble us at the recollection thereof.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**Give other examples in Scripture similar to that of Elijah's where the Lord brings comfort to the person who let the Lord down.**

### **1 Kings 19:7-10**

Two things are made prominent in the opening verses of 1 Kings 19, the one serving to enhance the other: the bitter fruits of the prophet's panic and the superabounding grace of the Lord unto his erring servant. The threatening message sent by the furious Jezebel had filled Elijah with consternation, and in his subsequent actions we are given to behold *the effects* which follow when the heart is filled with unbelief and fear. Instead of spreading the queen's message before his Master, Elijah took matters into his own hands; instead of waiting patiently for Him, he acted on hasty impulse. First, he deserted his post of duty and fled from Jezreel, whither "the hand of the Lord" had brought him. Second, occupied solely with self, he "went for his life," being no longer actuated by the glory of God nor the good of His people. Third, folly now possessed him, for in rushing to Beersheba he entered the territory of Jehoshaphat, whose son had married "the daughter of Ahab"—not even does "common sense" regulate those who are out of fellowship with God.

Elijah dare not remain at Beersheba, so he goes "a day's journey into the wilderness," illustrative of the fact that when unbelief and fear take possession, a spirit of restlessness fills the soul so that it is no longer capable of being still before God. Finally, when his feverish energy had spent itself, the prophet flung himself beneath a juniper tree and prayed for death. He was now in the slough of despond, feeling that life was no longer worth living. And it is on *that* dark background we behold the glories of Divine grace which now shone forth so blessedly. In the hour of his despair and need, the Lord did not forsake His poor servant. No, first He gave His beloved sleep, to rest his jaded nerves. Second, He sent an angel to minister unto him. Third, He provided refreshments for his body. This was grace indeed; not only undeserved but entirely unsought by the Tishbite. Wondrous indeed are the ways of Him with whom we have to do, who is "longsuffering to us-ward."

And what was Elijah's response to these amazing overtures of God's mercy? Was he overwhelmed by the Divine favor? Melted by such lovingkindness? Cannot the reader, yea the Christian reader, supply the answer from his own sad experience? When you have wandered from the Lord and forsaken the paths of righteousness, and He has borne with your waywardness, and instead of visiting your transgressions with the rod has continued to shower His temporal blessings upon you, has a sense of His goodness led you to repentance, or while still in a backslidden state have you not rather accepted God's benefits as a matter of course, unmoved by the most tender mercies? Such is fallen human nature the world over, in every age: "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19). And Elijah was no exception, for we are told "he did eat and drink, and *laid him down again*" (v. 6), —no sign of repentance for the past, no hint of gratitude for present mercies, no exercise of soul about future duty.

Ah, in this line of the picture we are shown yet another effect which follows upon the heart's giving way to unbelief and fear, and that is *insensibility of soul*. When the heart is estranged from God, when self becomes the center and

circumference of our interests, a hardness and deadness steals over us so that we are impervious unto the Lord's goodness. Our vision is dimmed, so that we no longer appreciate the benefits bestowed upon us. We become indifferent, callous, unresponsive. We descend to the level of the beasts, consuming what is given us with no thought of the Creator's faithfulness. Does not this short sentence sum up the life of the unregenerate: "They eat and drink and lie down again"—without any regard for God, care for their souls, or concern for eternity? And my reader, that is the case with a backsliding believer: he comes down to the level of the ungodly, for God no longer has the chief place in his heart and thoughts.

And what was the Lord's response to such gross ingratitude on the part of His servant? Did He now turn from him in disgust, as deserving no further consideration from Him? Well He might, for despising grace is no ordinary sin. Yet while grace does not make light of sin—as the sequel here will make evident—yet if sin were able to thwart grace it would cease to be *grace*. And God was dealing in grace, sovereign grace, with the prophet. Wherefore we read, "And the angel of the Lord came again the *second* time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee' " (1 Kings 19:7). Truly we must exclaim with the Psalmist, "He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hid his face from him" (22:24). And why? Because God is love, and love "suffereth long and is kind . . . is not easily provoked . . . beareth all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

"And the angel of the Lord came again the second time," How wondrous is the Lord's patience! "God hath spoken once" and that should be sufficient for us, yet it rarely is so, and therefore is it added "*twice* have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God" (Ps. 62:11). The first time the cock crew Peter paid no heed to it, but "the *second* time it crew" he "called to mind the word which Jesus said unto him . . . and when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mark 14:72). Alas, how slow we are to respond to the divine advances: "And a voice spoke to him again the second time. What God has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:15). "Rejoice in the Lord always:" surely the Christian needs not to have such a word repeated! The apostle knew better: "*Again* I say, Rejoice!" is added (Phil. 4:4). What dull scholars we are: "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again" (Heb. 5:12), and thus it has to be "line upon line, precept upon precept."

"And the angel of the Lord came again the second time." It seems most probable that it was evening when the angel came to Elijah the first time and bade him arise and eat, for we are told he had gone "a day's journey into the wilderness" before he sat down under the juniper bush. After he had partaken of the refreshment provided by such august (majestic) hands, Elijah had lain him down again and night had spread her temporary veil over the scorched sands. When the angel came and touched him the second time, day had dawned: through the intervening hours of darkness the celestial messenger had kept watch and ward while the weary prophet slept. Ah, the love of God knows no change—it fainteth not, neither is weary. Darkness makes no difference and serves not to conceal its object from it. Unfailing love watches over the believer during the hours when he is insensible to its presence. "Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end"—unto the end of all their wanderings and unworthiness.

"And said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee," May we not perceive here a gentle rebuke for the prophet? "The journey is too great for thee." What journey? He had not been directed to take any! It was a journey undertaken of his own accord, a devising of his own self-will. It was a journey away from the post of duty, which he ought, at that hour, to have been occupying. It was as though this heavenly messenger said to the prophet: See what comes of your self-will; it has reduced you to weakness and starvation. Nevertheless God has taken pity on you and furnished refreshment: He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. The Lord is full of kindness: He foresees the further demands which are going to be made upon your frame, so "Arise and eat." Elijah had fixed his mind on the distant Horeb, and so God anticipates his needs, even though they were the needs of a truant servant and rebellious child. O what a God is ours!

But there is a practical lesson here for each of us, even for those whom grace hath preserved from backsliding. "The journey is too great for thee." Not only life's journey as a whole, but each daily segment of it will make demands above and beyond our own unaided powers. The faith required, the courage demanded, the patience needed, the trials to be borne, the enemies to be overcome, are "too great" for mere flesh and blood. What then? Why, begin the day as Elijah began this one: "Arise and eat." You do not propose to go forth to a day's work without first supplying your body with food and drink, and is the soul more able to do without nourishment? God does not ask you to provide the spiritual food, but has graciously placed it by your side. All He asks is, "Arise and eat:" feed on the heavenly manna that your strength may be renewed; begin the day by partaking of the Bread of Life, that you may be thoroughly furnished for the many demands that will be made upon your graces.

"And he arose, and did eat and drink" (v. 8). Ah, though his case was such a sad one, yet "the root of the matter" was in him. He did not scorn the provision supplied him nor despise the use of means. Though there is yet no sign of gratitude, no returning of thanks to the gracious Giver, yet when bidden to eat, Elijah obediently complied. Though he had taken matters into his own hands, he did not now defy the angel to his face. As he had refused to lay violent hands upon himself, asking the Lord to take his life from him, so now he did not deliberately starve himself but ate the food set before him. The righteous may fall, yet he will not be "utterly cast down." The flax may not burn brightly, yet smoke will evidence that it has not quite gone out. Life in the believer may wane to a low ebb, yet sooner or later it will give proof that it is still there.

"And went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God" (v. 8). In His grace the Lord passes over the infirmities of those whose hearts are upright with Him and who sincerely love Him, though there still be that in them which ever seeks to oppose His love. Very blessed is the particular detail now before us: God not only reviewed the flagging energy of His servant but He caused the food which he had eaten to supply him with strength for a long time to come. Should the skeptic ask, How could that single meal nourish the prophet for almost six weeks? It would be sufficient answer to bid him explain *how* our food supplies us with energy for a single day! The greatest philosopher cannot explain the mystery, but the simplest believer knows that it is by the power and blessing of God upon it. No matter how much food we eat, or how choice it be, unless the divine blessing attend it, it nourishes us not a single whit. The same God who can make a meal energize us for forty minutes can make it do so for forty days when He so pleases.

"Horeb the mount of God" was certainly a remarkable place for Elijah to make for, for there is no spot on earth where the presence of God was so signally manifested as there, at least in Old Testament times. It was there that Jehovah had appeared unto Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-4). It was there the Law had been given to Israel, (Deut. 4:15), under such awe-inspiring phenomena. It was there that Moses had communed with Him for forty days and nights. Yet, though Israel's prophets and poets were wont to draw their sublimest imagery from the splendors and terrors of that scene, strange to say there is no record in Scripture of any Israelite visiting that holy mount from the time the Law was given until Elijah fled there from Jezebel. Whether it was his actual intention to proceed thither when he left Jezreel we know not. Why he went there we cannot be sure. Perhaps, as Matthew Henry suggested, it was to indulge his melancholy, saying with Jeremiah, "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!" (9:2).

Strangely enough there are some who think that the prophet wended (proceeded) his way across the wilderness to Horeb because he had received instructions from the angel to do so. But surely this view is negated by the sequel: the Lord had not twice uttered that searching and rebuking, "What doest thou here, Elijah?", had he come thither in obedience to the celestial messenger. That his steps were divinely guided thither we doubt not, for there was a striking propriety that he who was peculiarly the legal reformer should meet with Jehovah in the place where the Law had been promulgated—compare Moses and Elijah appearing with Christ on the mount of transfiguration. Though Elijah came not to Horeb by the *command* of God, he was directed there by the secret *providence* of God: "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9). And how? By a secret impulse from within which destroys not his freedom of action. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1),—the waters of a river flow freely, yet is their course determined by Heaven!

"And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place" (v. 9). At last the prophet was contented with the distance he had put between himself and the one who had sworn to avenge the death of her prophets: there in that remote mountain, concealed in some dark cave amid its precipices, he felt secure. How he now employed himself we are not told. If he tried to engage in prayer we may be sure he had no liberty and still less delight therein. More probably he sat and mused upon his troubles. If His conscience accused him that he had acted too hastily in fleeing from Jezreel, that he ought not to have yielded to his fears, but rather put his trust in God and proceeded to instruct the nation, yet the sequel indicates he would have stifled such humiliating convictions instead of confessing to God his failure. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Prov. 14:15): in the light of such a scripture who can doubt that Elijah was now engaged in pitying and vindicating himself, reflecting on the ingratitude of his fellow-countrymen and aggrieved at the harsh treatment of Jezebel?

"And, behold, the word of the Lord came to him" (v. 9). God had spoken to him personally on previous occasions. The word of the Lord had ordered him to hide by the brook Cherith (17:2, 3). It had come to him again, bidding him betake himself to Zarephath (17:8, 9). And yet again it had commanded him to show himself unto Ahab (18:1). But it seems to the writer that here we have something different from the other instances. As the fugitive lurked in the cave, we are told, "and, *behold*, the word of the Lord came to him." That expressive term does not occur in any of the previous passages and its employment here is the Spirit's intimation that something extraordinary is before us. On this occasion it was something more than a divine *message* which was communicated to the prophet's ear, being nothing less than a visit from a divine *person* which the prophet now received. It was none other than the second Person of the Trinity, the Eternal "Word" (John 1:1), who now interrogated the erring Tishbite. This is unmistakably clear from the next clause: "and *He* said unto him." Very remarkable, very solemn is this.

"And He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" (v. 9). Elijah had turned aside from the path of duty, and his Master knew it. The living God knows where His servants are, what they are doing and not doing. None can escape His omniscient gaze, for His eyes are in every place (Prov. 15:3). The Lord's question was a rebuke, a searching word addressed to his conscience. As we do not know which particular word the Lord accentuated, we will emphasize each one separately. "*What* doest thou?": is it good or evil, for totally inactive, in either mind or body, man cannot be. "*What* doest thou?": art thou employing thy time for the glory of God and the good of His people, or is it being wasted in peevish repinings? "*What* doest *thou*?": thou who art the servant of the Most High who hast been so highly honored, who hast received such clear tokens of His aid and depended upon the Almighty for protection! "*What* doest thou *here*?": away from the land of Israel, away from the work of reformation.

"And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my



life, to take it away" (v. 10). As we ponder these words we find ourselves out of accord with the commentators, most of whom severely criticize the prophet for seeking to excuse himself and throw the blame on others. That which impresses the writer first is the ingenuousness of Elijah: there were no evasions and equivocations, but a frank and candid explanation of his conduct. True, what he here advanced furnished no sufficient reason for his flight, yet it was the truthful declaration of an honest heart. Well for both writer and reader if *he* can always give as good an account of himself when challenged by the Holy One. If we were as open and frank with the Lord as Elijah was, we could expect to be dealt with as graciously as he was; for note it well, the prophet received no rebuke from God in answer to his outspokenness.

"I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts" was a statement of fact: he had not shrunk from the most difficult and dangerous service for his Master and his people. It was not because his zeal had cooled that he had fled from Jezreel. "For the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword." Elijah had been deeply distressed to behold how grievously the Lord was dishonored by the nation which was called by His name. God's glory lay very near his heart, and it affected him deeply to see His laws broken, His authority flouted, His worship despised, the homage of the people given to senseless idols and their tacit consent to the murder of His servants. "And I, even I only, am left." He had, at imminent peril of his life, labored hard to put a stop to Israel's idolatry and to reclaim the nation; but to no avail. So far as he could perceive, he had labored in vain and spent his strength for nought. "And they seek my life, to take it away:" what then is the use of my wasting any more time on such a stiffnecked and unresponsive people!

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

### How accurate was each part of Elijah's answers to the Lord?

#### 1 Kings 19:11-14

"And He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice," (1 Kings 19:11, 12). Elijah was now called upon to witness a most remarkable and awe-inspiring display of God's power. The description which is here given of the scene, though brief, is so graphic that any words of ours would only serve to blunt its forcefulness. What we desire to do is rather to ascertain the *meaning and message* of this sublime manifestation of God: its message to Elijah, to Israel, and to ourselves. Oh, that our eyes may be anointed to discern, our heart so affected as to appreciate, our thoughts controlled by the Holy Spirit, and our pen directed unto the glory of the Most High and the blessing of His dear people.

In seeking to discover the spiritual significance of what the prophet here witnessed upon the mount, we must ponder the scene in connection with what has preceded it both in the history of Israel and in the experience of Elijah himself. Then we must consider it in relation to what immediately follows, for there is undoubtedly a close connection between the startling scenes depicted in verses 11 and 12 and the solemn message contained in verses 15 to 18, the latter serving to interpret the former. Finally, we need to examine this striking incident in the light of the analogy of faith, the Scriptures as a whole, for one part of them serves to explain another. It is as we become better acquainted with the "ways" of God, as revealed in His Word, that we are able to enter more intelligently into the meaning of His "acts" (Ps. 103:7).

How then are we to consider this manifestation of God upon the mount with regard to Elijah himself? First, as the Lord's dealing with him in *grace*. This should be evident from the context. There we have seen the touching response which God made to His servant's failure. So far from forsaking him in his hour of weakness and need, the Lord had ministered most tenderly to him, exemplifying that precious promise, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:13). And Elijah *did* fear the Lord, and though his faith was for the moment eclipsed, the Lord did not turn His back upon him on that account. Sleep was given to him; an angel supplied him with food and drink; supernatural strength was communicated to his frame, so that he was enabled to do without any further nourishment for forty days and nights. And when he reached the cave, Christ Himself, the eternal "Word" had stood before him in theophanic manifestation. What *high favors* were those! What proofs that we have to do with One who is "the God of all grace"!

Of what has just been pointed out it may be said, True, but then Elijah *slighted* that grace: instead of being suitably affected thereby he remained petulant and peevish; instead of confessing his failure he attempted to justify the forsaking of his post of duty. Even so, then what? Why, does not the Lord here teach the refractory prophet a needed lesson? Does He not appear before him in a terrifying manner for the purpose of rebuking him? Not so do we read this incident. Those who take such a view must have little experimental acquaintance with the wondrous grace of God. He is not fickle and variable as we are: He does not at one time deal with us according to His own compassionate benignity and at another treat with us according to our ill deserts. When God *begins* to deal in grace with one of His elect, He *continues* dealing with him in grace, and nothing in the creature can impede the outflow of His lovingkindness.

One cannot examine the wonders which occurred here on Horeb without seeing in them an intended reference to the awful solemnities of Sinai with its "thunders and lightnings," when the Lord "descended upon it in fire" and the whole

mount "quaked greatly" (Ex. 19:16, 18). Yet we miss the force of the allusion unless we heed carefully the words, "the Lord was *not* in the wind," "the Lord was *not* in the earthquake," "the Lord was *not* in the fire." God was not dealing with Elijah on the ground of the legal covenant. That threefold negative is the Spirit saying to us, Elijah had "not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest" (Heb. 12:18). Rather was the prophet addressed by the "still small voice," which was plain intimation that he had "come unto mount Zion" (Heb. 12:22)—the Mount of grace. That Jehovah should reveal Himself thus to Elijah was a mark of divine favor, conferring upon him the same sign of distinction which He had vouchsafed unto Moses in that very place, when He showed him His glory and made all His goodness pass before him.

Second, the method which the Lord chose to take with His servant on this occasion was designed for his *instruction*. Elijah was dejected at the failure of his mission. He had been jealous for the Lord God of hosts, but what had come of all his zeal? He had prayed as probably none before him had ever prayed, yet though miracles had been wrought in answer thereto, that which lay nearest to his heart had not been attained. Ahab had been quite unaffected by what he had witnessed. The nation was not reclaimed unto God. Jezebel was as defiant as ever. Elijah appeared to be entirely alone, and his utmost efforts were unavailing. The enemy still triumphed in spite of all. The Lord therefore sets before His servant an object lesson. By solemn exhibitions of His mighty power He impressively reminds Elijah that He is not confined to any one agent in the carrying out of His designs. The elements are at His disposal when He is pleased to employ them: a gentler method and milder agent if such be His will.

It was quite natural that Elijah should have formed the conclusion that the whole work was to be done by himself, coming as he did with all the vehemence of a mighty wind; that under God all obstacles would be swept away—idolatry abolished and the nation brought back to the worship of Jehovah. The Lord now graciously makes known unto the prophet that He has other arrows in His quiver which He will discharge in due time. The "wind," the "earthquake," "the fire," should each play their appointed part, and thereby make way more distinctly and effectively for the milder ministry of the "still small voice." Elijah was but one agent among several. "One soweth, and another reapeth" (John 4: 37), Elijah had performed his part and soon would he be grandly rewarded for his faithfulness. Nor had he labored in vain, yet another man and not himself should enter into his labors. How gracious of the Lord thus to take His servants into His confidence!

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). This is exactly what occurred there on Horeb. By means of what we may term a panoramic parable God revealed the future unto Elijah. Herein we may discover the bearing of this remarkable incident *upon Israel*. In the immediate sequel we find the Lord bidding Elijah anoint Hazael over Syria, Jehu over Israel, and Elisha prophet in his own room, assuring him that "it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay, and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay" (v. 17). In the work of those men we may perceive the prophetic meaning of the solemn phenomena Elijah beheld—they were symbols of the dire calamities with which God would punish the apostate nation. Thus the strong "wind" was a figure of the work of judgment which Hazael performed on Israel, when he "set their strongholds on fire and slew their young men with the sword" (2 Kings 8:12); the "earthquake," of the revolution under Jehu, when he utterly destroyed the house of Ahab (2 Kings 9:7-10); and the "fire," the work of judgment completed by Elisha.

Third, the incident as a whole was designed for the *consolation* of Elijah. Terrible indeed were the judgments which would fall upon guilty Israel, yet in wrath Jehovah would remember mercy. The chosen nation would not be utterly exterminated, and therefore did the Lord graciously assure His despondent servant, "Yet will I leave Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (v. 18). As the "strong wind," the "earthquake," and the "fire" were emblematic portents of the judgments which God was shortly to send upon His idolatrous people, so the "still small voice" which followed them looked forward to the *mercy* He had in store after His "strange work" had been accomplished. For we read that, after Hazael had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz, "the Lord was gracious unto them, and had respect unto them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet" (2 Kings 13:23). Once again we say, how gracious of the Lord to make known unto Elijah "things to come," and thus acquaint him with what should be the sequel to his labors.

If we consider the remarkable occurrences of Horeb in the light of the Scriptures as a whole, we shall find they were indicative and illustrative of one of the general principles in the Divine government of this world. The *order* of the divine manifestations before Elijah was analogous to the general tenor of the divine proceedings. Whether it be with regard to a people or an individual, it is usual for the bestowment of divine mercies to be preceded by awe-inspiring displays of God's power and displeasure against sin. First the plagues came upon Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea, and then the deliverance of the Hebrews. The majesty and might of Jehovah exhibited on Sinai and then the blessed proclamation, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6, 7).

Fourth, the method followed by the Lord on this occasion was meant to *furnish Elijah for further service*. The "still small voice," speaking quietly and gently, was designed to calm and sooth his ruffled spirit. It evidenced afresh the kindness and tenderness of the Lord, who would assuage Elijah's dis-appointment and cheer his heart. Where the soul is reassured of His Master's love the servant is nerved to face fresh dangers and oppositions for His sake and to tackle any

task He may assign him. It was thus also He dealt with Isaiah: first abasing him with a vision of His glory, which made the prophet conscious of his utter sinfulness and insufficiency, and then assuring him of the remission of his sins: and in consequence Isaiah went forward on a most thankless mission (Isa. 6:1-12). The sequel here shows the Lord's measures were equally effective with Elijah; he received a fresh commission and obediently he discharged it.

"And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave" (v. 13). This is remarkable. So far as we can gather from the inspired record, Elijah stood unmoved at the varied displays of Jehovah's power, fearful as they were to behold—surely a clear intimation that his conscience was not burdened by guilt! But when the still small voice sounded, he was at once affected. The Lord addressed His servant, not in an angry and austere manner, but with gentleness and tenderness, to show him what a compassionate and gracious God he had to do with, and his heart was touched. The Hebrew word for "still" is the one employed in Psalm 107:29, "He maketh the storm a *calm*." The wrapping of his face in his mantle betokened two things: his reverence for the divine majesty and a sense of his own unworthiness—as the seraphim are represented as covering their faces in the Lord's presence, (Isa. 6:2, 3). When Abraham found himself in the presence of God, he said, "I am dust and ashes" (Gen. 18). When Moses beheld Him in the burning bush, he "hid his face" (Ex. 3).

Many and profitable are the lessons *for us* in this remarkable incident. First, from it we may perceive *it is God's way to do the unexpected*. Were we to put it to a vote as to which they thought the more likely, for the Lord to have spoken to Elijah through the mighty wind and earthquake or the still small voice, we suppose the great majority would say the former. And is it not much the same in our own spiritual experience? We earnestly beg Him to grant us a more definite and settled assurance of our acceptance in Christ, and then look for His answer in a sort of electric shock imparted to our souls or in an extraordinary vision; when instead, it is by the still small voice of the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Again, we beseech the Lord that we may grow in grace, and then expect His answer in the form of more conscious enjoyment of His presence; whereas He quietly gives us to see more of the hidden depravity of our hearts. Yes, God often does the unexpected in His dealings with us.

Second, *the pre-eminence of the Word*. Reduced to a single word we may say that the varied phenomena witnessed by Elijah upon the mount were a matter of the Lord *speaking* to him. When it is said, "The Lord was not in" the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, we are to understand it was not through *them* He addressed Himself to the prophet's heart; rather was it by the "still small voice." In regarding this last agent as the emblem of the Word, we find confirmation in the striking fact that the Hebrew word for "small" is the self-same one used in "a small round thing" in Exodus 16:14, and we need hardly add, the manna whereby the Lord fed Israel in the wilderness was a type (foreshadow) of the food He has provided for our souls. Though the wondrous wisdom and potent power of God are displayed in creation, yet it is not through nature that God may be understood and known, but through the Word applied by His Spirit.

Third, in the phenomena of the mount we may perceive *a striking illustration of the vivid contrast* between the Law and the Gospel. The rock-rending wind, the earthquake and the fire figured the terror-producing Law (as may be seen from their presence at Sinai), but the "still small voice" was a fit emblem of "the Gospel of peace" which soothes the troubled breast. As the plough and the harrow are necessary in order to break up the hard earth and prepare it for the seed, so a sense of the majesty, holiness and wrath of God is the harbinger which prepares us to appreciate truly His grace and love. The careless must be awakened, the soul made sensible of its danger, the conscience convicted of the sinfulness of sin, ere there is any turning unto God and fleeing from the wrath to come. Yet those experiences are not saving ones: they do but prepare the way, as the ministry of John the Baptist fitted men to behold the Lamb of God.

Fourth, thus we may see in this incident a figure of *God's ordinary manner of dealing with souls*, for it is customary for Him to use the Law before the Gospel. In spite of much which is now said to the contrary, this writer still believes that it is usual for the Spirit to wound before He heals, to shake the soul over hell before He communicates a hope of heaven, to bring the heart to despair before it is brought to Christ. Self-complacency has to be rudely shattered and the rags of self-righteousness torn off if a sense of deep need is to fill the heart. The Hebrews had to come under the whip of their masters and to be made to groan in the brick kilns before they longed to be delivered from Egypt. A man must know himself to be utterly lost before he will crave salvation. The wind and fire must do their work before we can appreciate the "joyful sound" (Ps. 89:15). Sentence of death has to be written upon us ere we turn to Christ for life.

Fifth, this is often God's *method of answering prayer*. Christians are very apt to look for God to respond unto their petitions with striking signs and spectacular wonders, and because these are not given in a marked and permanent form they conclude He heeds them not. But the presence and power of God are not to be gauged by abnormal manifestations and extraordinary visitations. The wonders of God are rarely wrought with noise and vehemence. Whose ear can detect the falling of the dew? Vegetation grows silently but nonetheless surely. In grace as in nature God usually works gently, softly, unperceived, except through the effects produced. The greatest fidelity and devotion to God are not to be found where excitement and sensationalism hold forth. The blessing of the Lord attends the unobtrusive and persevering use of His appointed means which attracts not the attention of the vulgar and carnal.

Sixth, this scene on Horeb, contains *a timely message for preachers*. How many ministers of the Gospel have become thoroughly discouraged, though with far less provocation than Elijah. They have been untiring in their labors, zealous for the Lord, faithful in preaching His Word, yet nothing comes of it, there is no response, all appears to be in vain. Even so, granted that such be the case, then what? Seek to lay hold afresh on the grand truth that the purpose of the Lord shall not fail, and that purpose includes *tomorrow* as well as today! The Most High is not confined to any one

agent. Elijah thought the whole work was to be accomplished through his instrumentality, but was taught that he was only one factor among several. Do your duty where God has stationed you: plough up the fallow ground and sow the seed, and though there be no fruit in your day, who knows but an Elisha may follow you and do the reaping.

Seventh, there is *a solemn warning here to the unsaved*. God will not be mocked with impunity. Though He be longsuffering, there is a limit to His patience. Those who improved not the day of their visitation and opportunity under the ministry of Elijah were made to feel what a terrible thing it is to flout the divine warnings. Mercy was followed by judgment, drastic and devastating. The strongholds of Israel were overthrown and their young men slain by the sword. Is this to be the awful fate of the present generation? Is it devoted by God to destruction? It looks more and more like it. The masses are given up to a spirit of madness. The most solemn portents of the approaching storm are blatantly disregarded. The words of God's servants fall upon deaf ears. O my unsaved readers, flee to Christ without further delay ere the flood of God's wrath engulfs you.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

Elijah on Mount Herob heard the strong wind and saw the terrible effects of it, for it "rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks" (1 Kings 19:11). He felt the shock of an earthquake and saw the eruption of fire. But the Lord chose to speak to Elijah not out of the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire; but with a "still, small voice", (1 Kings 19:12) to convince and persuade him. **Does God speak today in a still small voice and if so what state of mind should we be in to hear Him?**

Rom. 10:17

### 1 Kings 19:15-21

The failure of Elijah had been of a different character from that of Jonah. It does not appear that he had done any moral wrong in quitting Jezreel; rather was his conduct in line with Christ's direction to His disciples: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matthew 10:23). They were not to expose themselves rashly to danger, but if they could do so honorably, avoid it and thus preserve themselves for future service—as numbers of our Reformers and members of their flocks took refuge on the Continent in the days of wicked Queen Mary. God had given Elijah no express order to remain at Jezreel and continue the work of reformation, and "where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). It was more a case of the Lord's testing His servant with "circumstances," leaving him to himself, to show us what was in his heart, allowing him to exercise his own judgment and follow his own inclinations. Had there been something more involved than this, had the prophet been guilty of deliberate disobedience, the Lord's dealings with him at Horeb would have been quite different from what they were.

What has been said above is not for the purpose of excusing Elijah, but to view his fault in a fair perspective. Some have unfairly magnified his failure, charging him with that which cannot justly be laid to his account. We certainly believe he made a lamentable mistake in deserting the post of duty to which "the hand of the Lord" had brought him (1 Kings 18:46), for he received no word from his Master to leave there. Nor can we justify his petulance under the juniper tree and his request for the Lord to take away his life—that is for Him to decide, and not for us at any time. Moreover, the question put to him twice at Horeb, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Evidently implied a gentle rebuke: yet it was more an error of judgment which he had committed than a sin of the heart. He had felt at liberty to exercise his own discretion and to act according to the dictates of his own feelings. God permitted this that we might know the strongest characters are as weak as water the moment He withdraws His upholding hand.

We have already seen how tenderly Jehovah dealt with His erring servant in the wilderness, let us now admire the grace He exercised toward him at Horeb. That which is to be before us reminds us much of the Psalmist's experience: the Lord who was his Shepherd had not only made him to lie down in green pastures, but "He restoreth my soul" (23:2,3), he acknowledged. The One who had refreshed and fed His servant under the juniper tree now recovers him from his useless repinings, reclaims him from his wanderings, and raises him to a position of honor in His service. Elijah was incapable of restoring himself, and there was no human being who could have delivered him from the slough of despond, so when there was none other eye to pity him the Lord had compassion upon him. And is it not thus, at some time or other, in the experience of all God's servants and people? He who first delivered us from a horrible pit continues to care for us, and when we wander from Him He restores our souls and leads us back into the paths of righteousness.

"And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus" (1 Kings 19:15). "The prophet was bemoaning the failure of all his efforts to glorify God, and the obstinate determination of his people to continue in their apostasy. It was thus he spent his time in the cave at Horeb, brooding over his disappointment, and lashing himself, by reflecting upon the conduct of the people. A solitary place, with nothing to do, might be congenial with such a disposition; it might foster it, but would never heal it: and thus Elijah might have succumbed to a settled melancholy or raving madness. The only hope for persons in such circumstances is to come out from their lonely haunts, and to be actively employed in some useful and benevolent occupation. This is the best cure for melancholy: to set about doing something which will require muscular exertion, and which will benefit others. Hence God directed Elijah to quit this present lonely

abode, which only increased the sadness and irritation of his spirit; and so He gave him a commission to execute a long way off" (John Simpson).

"And the Lord said unto him, Go, *return* on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus" (v. 15). This is the course God takes when He restores the soul of one of His erring people, causing him to retrace his steps and return to the place of duty. When Abraham left Egypt—whither he had gone "down" in the time of famine: Genesis 12:10—we read that "he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning" (Gen. 13: 3). When the church at Ephesus "left her first love," Christ's message to her was "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Rev. 2:4). So now Elijah is required to go back the way he had come, through the wilderness of Arabia, which was part of the course he would traverse on his way to Damascus. This is still God's word to His strayed sheep: "*Return*, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful" (Jer. 3:12).

When Peter repented for his great sin, the Lord not only forgave him, but recommissioned His servant: "Feed My sheep" (John 21:16). So here, the Lord not only restored the prophet's soul, but appointed him to fresh work in His service. "And when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria" (v. 15). This was a high honor for Jehovah to confer upon Elijah, such as He had bestowed upon Samuel (1 Sam 16:13). How gracious is our God! How patiently He bears with our infirmities! Observe how these passages teach that it is not by the people but by God that kings reign (Prov. 8:15). "There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God," and therefore does He require of us, "let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1). In this "democratic" age it is necessary that ministers of the Gospel should press this truth: "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man *for the Lord's sake*: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers" (1 Pet. 2:13,14). Said the apostle to Titus, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates" (3:1).

"And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel" (v. 16). None can reign except those whom God makes kings, and they only so long as He pleases. This "anointing" or unction proclaimed their divine designation to this office and the qualification with which they should be endowed for their work. The Lord Jesus, who was "anointed with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:38), united in Himself the offices of prophet, priest and king: the only persons ordered to be anointed in the Scriptures. Infidels have raised an objection against our present verse by pointing out that Jehu was anointed, not by Elijah, but by a young prophet under the direction of Elisha (2 Kings 9:1-6). This objection may be disposed of in two ways. First, Jehu may have been anointed *twice*, as David was (1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 2:4); or, as "Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples" (John 4:1, 2), so Jehu is said to be anointed by Elijah because what took place in 2 Kings 9 was according to *his orders*.

"And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room" (v. 16). Here was an additional favor bestowed upon Elijah, that he should have the almost unique honor of ordaining his successor. That which had so quenched the Tishbite's spirit was the failure which attended his efforts: no impression seemed to be made on the idolatrous nation, he alone appeared to be concerned about the glory of the Lord God, and now his own life was imperiled. How his heart must have been comforted by the divine assurance that another was appointed to carry on the mission he had prosecuted so zealously! Hitherto there had been none to help him, but in the hour of his despondency God provides him with a suitable companion and successor. It has ever been a great consolation to godly ministers and their flocks to think that God will never lack instruments to conduct His work, that when *they* are removed *others* will be brought forward to carry on. One of the saddest and most solemn features of this degenerate age is that the ranks of the righteous are so depleted and scarcely any are being raised up to fill their places. It is this which makes the outlook doubly dark.

"And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay, and him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay" (v. 17). Elijah had wrought faithfully, but Israel had to be dealt with by other agents too: the three men whom he was bidden to anoint would in their turn bring down judgment upon the land. God was infinitely more jealous of His own honor than His servant could be, and He would by no means desert His cause or suffer His enemies to triumph as the prophet feared. But mark the *variety* of the instruments which God was pleased to employ: Hazael, king of Syria; Jehu, the rude captain of Israel; and Elisha, a young farmer—great differences here! And yet each one was needed for some special work in connection with that idolatrous people at that time. Ah, "the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). Yea, as some of the smaller and frailer members of the body perform the most useful—and essential offices, so it is often by the most unlettered and apparently unqualified men that God accomplishes the chief exploits in His kingdom.

We may also perceive here how God exercises His high sovereignty in the instruments He employs. Neither Hazael nor Jehu was a pious man: the former came to the throne by foully murdering his predecessor (2 Kings 8:15), while of the latter we read, "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam" (2 Kings 10:31). It is often His way to make use of wicked men to thrash those who have enjoyed but spurned particular favors at His hands. It is indeed remarkable how the Most High accomplishes His purpose through men whose only thought is to gratify their own evil lusts. True, their sin is neither diminished nor condoned because they are executing the decrees of Heaven; indeed, they are held fully accountable for the evil, yet they do only

that which God's hand and counsel determined before to be done, serving as His agent to inflict judgment upon His apostate people.

"And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay, and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." Unspeakably solemn is this. Though God bears "with much longsuffering" the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, yet there is a limit to His patience; "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov. 29:1). Long had God endured that horrible insult to His majesty, but the worshippers of Baal should shortly discover that His wrath was as great as His power. They had been faithfully warned: for three and a half years there had been a fearful drought and famine upon their land. A notable miracle had been wrought on Carmel, but only a fleeting impression had been made on the people. And now God announces that the "sword" shall do its fearful work, not mildly but thoroughly, until the land was completely purged of this great evil. And this is placed on record for all succeeding generations to ponder! The Lord has not changed: even as we write, His judgments are upon most of the world. O that the nations may heed His voice ere it be too late!

"Yet I will leave Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (v. 18). On this verse we take decided exception to the interpretation given by the great majority of the commentators, who see in it a divine *rebuke* unto the prophet's dark pessimism, supposing it was God's reply to his despondent "I only am left," when in reality there was a multitude in Israel who refused to join in the general idolatry. For several reasons we cannot accept any such view. Is it thinkable that there could actually be thousands in Israel who remained loyal to Jehovah and yet the prophet be totally unaware of their existence? It is not surprising to find one writer of note saying, "It has often been a subject of wonder to me how those seven thousand secret disciples could keep so close as to be unknown by their great leader: attar (fragrance) of roses will always betray its presence, hide it as we may"—but he creates his own difficulty. Moreover, such a view is quite out of harmony with the context: why, after bestowing honor upon the prophet, should the Lord suddenly reprove him?

The careful reader will observe that the marginal reading opposite "Yet I have left Me seven thousand" is, "Yet I will leave me seven thousand." The Hebrew allows of either, but we much prefer the latter, for it not only removed the difficulty of Elijah's ignorance (which the former necessarily involves), but it accords much better with the context. The Lord was graciously *comforting* His despondent servant. First, the Lord informed the prophet that another should take his place and carry on his mission. Next He declared He was by no means indifferent to the horrible situation, but would shortly make quick work of it in judgment. And now He assures him that, though summary judgment should be visited upon Israel, yet He would not make a full end of them, but would preserve a remnant for Himself. Nor does Romans 11:4 in anywise conflict with this, providing we change the word "answer" to "oracle" (as the Greek requires!), for God was not replying to an objection, but making known to Elijah things to come.

It will thus be seen that we take an entirely different view from the popular interpretation not only of verse 18, but of the whole passage. Every writer we have consulted regards these verses as expressing the Lord's displeasure against a refractory servant, that He dealt with him in judgment, *setting him aside* from the honored position he had occupied by appointing Elisha in his stead. But apart from the gentle rebuke implied in His question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?", there is nothing to signify the Lord's displeasure, but much to the contrary. Rather do we regard these verses as a record of God's comforting answer to the prophet's despondency. Elijah felt that the forces of evil had triumphed: the Lord announces that the worship of Baal should be utterly destroyed (v. 17 and cf. 2 Kings 10:25-28). Elijah grieved because he "only was left": the Lord declares "I will *leave* Me seven thousand in Israel." So desperate was the situation, they sought to take the life of Elijah: The Lord promises that Elisha shall complete his mission. Thus did Jehovah most tenderly silence his fears and reassure his heart.

With the verses which have been before us, we like to link those words of Christ to His apostles, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have *made known* unto you" (John 15:15)—indicative of the intimate fellowship they enjoyed with Him. Thus it was with Elijah. The Lord of hosts had condescended to make known unto him things to come, which certainly had not been the case if he were estranged from Him. It was like what we read of in Genesis 18:17, "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" No, He did not, for Abraham was "the friend of God" (Jas. 2:23). Blessed indeed is it to see how the Lord had restored Elijah's soul to the most intimate communion with Himself: recovering him from his gloom and reinstating him in His service.

"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him" (v. 19). Here is good evidence that the Lord *had* restored the soul of His servant. Elijah raised no objection, made no delay, but responded promptly. Obedience must ever be the test of our relations with God: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). In this instance it involved a difficult journey of some one hundred and sixty miles—the distance between Horeb and Abel-meholah (v. 16 and cf. 4:12)—most of it across the desert; but when God commissions, it is for us to comply. There was no jealous resentment that another should fill his place: as soon as Elisha was encountered Elijah cast his mantle upon him—indicative of his investiture with the prophetic office and a sign of friendship that he would take him under his care and tuition. So indeed the young farmer understood it, as is evident from his response. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee" (v. 20). The Spirit of God moved him to accept the call, so that he at once relinquished all his worldly expectations. See how easily the Lord can stir

men up to undertake His work in the face of great discouragements. "Had he consulted with flesh and blood, he would have been very unwilling to be in Elijah's situation, when thus hunted in those dangerous times, and when there was nothing but persecution to be expected. Yet Elisha chose to be a servant to a prophet rather than master of a large farm, and cheerfully resigned all for God. The prayer of divine grace can remove every objection and conquer every prejudice" (Robert Simpson). "And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" (v. 20). Very beautiful is this: there was no self-importance, but rather total self-renunciation. Like John the Baptist (who came in his *spirit*: Luke 1:17) he was sent to usher in another, and his language here was tantamount to "he must increase, I must decrease." Blessed humility!

"And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah and ministered unto him" (v. 21). What a lovely finishing touch to the picture! Certainly Elisha did not look upon Elijah as one who had been set aside by the Lord! What comfort for the Tishbite now to have for his companion one of so dutiful and affectionate disposition; and what a privilege for this young man to be under so eminent a tutor! And what is the next reference to him in Scripture? This, "And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel" (1 Kings 21:17, 18): how completely that disposes of the popular idea that God had discarded him from His service. Plainly he had been thoroughly reinstated and was back again on the same old terms with his Master. That is why we have entitled this section "Elijah's Recovery."

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**Show from 1 Kings 19:15-18 how the Lord considered Elijah a friend despite his failure seen in 1 Kings 19:4.**

John 15:15-17

**Describe Elisha's response after Elijah "threw his mantle on him" (1 Kings 19:19).**

### **1 Kings 20:1-21:16**

The contents of 1 Kings 20 have presented quite a problem to most of those who have written thereon. It opens with the statement, "And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it." So confident of victory was he that he sent messengers to Ahab saying, "Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children" (v. 3). Having seen something of the accumulated and aggravated sins of Ahab, we might well suppose the Lord would give success to this enterprise of Benhadad's and use him to humiliate and punish Ahab and his apostate consort. But this expectation is not realized. Strange as that appears, our surprise is greatly increased when we learn that a prophet came unto Ahab saying, "Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord" (v. 13). In the immediate sequel we behold the fulfilment of that prediction: "The king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter" (v. 21): thus the victory was not with Benhadad but with Ahab.

Nor does the above incident stand alone, for the next thing we read of is: "And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee" (v. 22). This seems passing strange: that the Lord should come to the help of such a one as Ahab. Again the prediction was fulfilled, for Benhadad came with such immense forces that the army of Israel appeared "like two little flocks of kids, but the Syrians filled the country" (v. 27). Once more, a prophet came to Ahab saying, "Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (v. 28). The outcome was that "The children of Israel slew of the Syrians a hundred thousand footmen in one day" (v. 29). But because he allowed Benhadad to go free, another prophet announced unto Ahab, "Thy life shall go for his life" (v. 42).

God's time to destroy Ahab and all who followed him in idolatry had not yet come. It was through Hazael and not Benhadad the divine vengeance was to be wrought. But if the hour of retribution had not then arrived, why was Benhadad permitted thus to menace the land of Samaria? Ah, it is the answer to that question which casts light upon the above problem. The "day of the Lord" is deferred because God is long-suffering to His elect, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, 10). Not until Noah and his family were safely in the ark did the windows of heaven open and pour down their devastating flood. Not until Lot was delivered from Sodom did fire and brimstone fall upon it: "I cannot do anything (said the destroying angel) till thou be come thither" (Gen. 19: 22). And so it was here: not until Elijah and his helper had completed their work, not until all the "seven thousand" whom Jehovah reserved for Himself had been called, would the work of judgment be effected.

Following upon the account of Elisha's call to the ministry the inspired narrative supplies us with no description of the activities in which they engaged, yet we may be sure that they redeemed the time. Probably in distant parts of the land they sought to instruct the people in the worship of Jehovah, opposing the prevailing idolatry and general corruption, laboring diligently though quietly to effect a solid reformation. It would seem that, following the example of Samuel (1

Sam. 10:5-10; 19:20), they established schools here and there for fitting young men unto the prophetic office, instructing them in the knowledge of God's Law and preparing them to become expounders of it unto the people, and also to lead in psalmody—an important service indeed. We base this view on the mention of "the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel" and "at Jericho" (2 Kings 2:3, 5). Thus it was that Elijah and Elisha were able to proceed for a year or two unmolested in their work, for being engaged in defending himself and his kingdom from powerful enemies, Ahab was too fully occupied to interfere with them. How wondrous are God's ways: kings and their armies are but pawns to be moved here and there as He pleases.

In what has been before us we may see what varied means the Lord employs to protect His servants from those who would injure them. He knows how to ward off the assaults of their enemies, who would oppose them in their pious efforts to be good. He can make all things smooth and secure for them, that they may proceed without annoyance in discharging the duties which He has assigned them. The Lord can easily fill the heads and hands of their opponents with such urgent business and solicitations that they have enough to do to take care of themselves without harassing His servants in their work. When David and his men were hard pressed in the wilderness of Maon and it appeared they were doomed, "There came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines" (1 Sam. 23:27, 28). How incapable we are of determining why God permits one nation to rise up against another, against this one rather than that!

The two prophets continued their work in preaching to the people and instructing their younger brethren for some time, and in view of the promise in 19:18 we may conclude the blessing of the Lord rested upon their labors, and that not a few were converted. Gladly would they have remained in this quiet and happy occupation, only too glad to escape the notice of the court. But the ministers of God are not to expect a smooth and easy life. They may be thus indulged for a brief season, especially after they have been engaged in some hard and perilous service, yet they must hold themselves in constant readiness to be called forth from their tranquil employment to fresh conflicts and severer duties, which will try their faith and demand all their courage. So it was now with Elijah. A fresh trial awaited him, a real ordeal, nothing less than being required to confront Ahab again, and this time pronounce his doom. But before considering the same we must look at that which occasioned it.

"And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread" (1 Kings 21:4). The reference is unto Ahab. Here lay the king of Israel in a room of the palace, in a fit of dejection. What had occasioned it? Had some invader overcome his army? No, his soldiers were still flushed with victory over the Syrians. Had his false prophets suffered another massacre? No, the worship of Baal had now recovered from the terrible disaster of Carmel. Had his royal consort been smitten down by the hand of death? No, Jezebel was still very much alive, about to lead him into further evil. What then had brought about his melancholy? The context tells us. Adjoining the royal residence was a vineyard owned by one of his subjects. A whim suddenly possessed the king that this vineyard must become his, so that it might be made an attractive extension to his own property, and he was determined to obtain it at all costs. The wealthy are not satisfied with their possessions but are constantly lusting after more.

Ahab approached Naboth, the owner of this vineyard, and offered to give him a better one for it or to purchase it for cash. Apparently that was an innocent proposal: in reality it was a subtle temptation. "The land shall not be sold forever (outright): for the land is Mine" (Lev. 25:23); "so shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (Num. 36:7). Thus it lay not within the lawful power of Naboth to dispose of his vineyard. But for that, there could have been no harm in meeting the equitable offer of Ahab, nay it had been discourteous, even churlish, to refuse his sovereign. But however desirous Naboth might be of granting the king's request, he could not do so without violating the divine Law which expressly forbade a man's alienating any part of the family inheritance. Thus a very real and severe test was now presented to Naboth: he had to choose between pleasing the king and displeasing the King of kings.

There are times when the believer may be forced to choose between compliance with human law and obedience to the divine Law. The three Hebrews were faced with that alternative when it was demanded that they should bow down and worship an image set up by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:14, 15). Peter and John were confronted with a similar situation when the Sanhedrin forbade them preach any more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). When the government orders any of God's children to work seven days in the factories, they are being asked to disobey the divine statute, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." While rendering to Caesar the things which Caesar may justly require, under no circumstances must we fail to render unto God those which He demands of us, and if we should be bidden to rob God, our duty is plain and clear: the inferior law must yield to the higher—loyalty to God takes precedence over all other considerations. The examples of the three Hebrews and the apostles leave no room for doubt on this point. How thankful we should be that the laws of our country so rarely conflict with the Law of God.

"And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee," 21:3. He started back with horror from such a proposal, looking upon it with alarm as a temptation to commit a horrible sin. Naboth took his stand on the written Word of God and refused to act contrary thereto, even when solicited to do so by the king himself. He was one of the seven thousand whom the Lord had reserved unto Himself, a member of the "remnant according to the election of grace." Hereby do such identify themselves, standing out from the compromisers and temporizers. A "Thus saith the Lord" is final with them: neither monetary inducements nor threats of punishment can move them to disregard it. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye"



(Acts 4:19), is their defence when browbeaten by the powers that be. Settle it in your mind, my reader, it is no sin, no wrong, to defy human authorities if they should require of you anything which manifestly clashes with the Law of the Lord. On the other hand, the Christian should be a pattern to others of a law-abiding citizen, so long as God's claims upon him be not infringed.

Ahab was greatly displeased by Naboth's refusal, for in the thwarting of his desire his pride was wounded, and so vexed was he to meet with this denial that he sulked like a spoiled child when his will is crossed. The king so took to heart his disappointment that he became miserable, took to his bed and refused nourishment. What a picture of the poor rich! Millionaires and those in high office are not to be envied, for neither material wealth nor worldly honors can bring contentment to the heart. Solomon proved that: he was permitted to possess everything the natural man craved, and then found it all to be nothing but "vanity and vexation of spirit." Is there not a solemn warning here for each of us? How we need to heed that word of Christ, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Coveting is being dissatisfied with the portion God has given me and lusting after something which belongs to my neighbor. Inordinate desires always lead to vexation, unfitting us to enjoy what is ours.

"But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard" (vv. 5, 6). How easy it is to misrepresent the most upright. Ahab made no mention of Naboth's conscientious grievance for not complying with his request, but speaks of him as though he had acted only with insubordination and obstinacy. On hearing that statement, Jezebel at once revealed her awful character: "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth" (v. 7). As Matthew Henry expressed it, "Under pretence of comforting her afflicted husband, she feeds his pride and passion, blowing the coals of his corruptions." She sympathized with his unlawful desire, strengthened his feeling of disappointment, tempted him to exercise an arbitrary power, and urged him to disregard the rights of another and defy the Law of God. Are you going to allow a subject to balk (refuse) you? Be not so squeamish: use your royal power: instead of grieving over a repulse, revenge it.

The most diabolical stratagem was now planned by this infamous woman in order to wrest the inheritance of Naboth from him. First, she resorted to forgery, for we are told "she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth" (v. 8). Second, she was guilty of deliberate hypocrisy. "Proclaim a fast" (v. 9), so as to convey the impression that some horrible wickedness had been discovered, threatening the city with divine judgment unless the crime were expiated—history contains ample proof that the vilest crimes have often been perpetrated under the cloak of religion. Third, she drew not the line at out-and-out perjury, suborning men to testify falsely: "set Naboth on high among the people (under color of giving him a fair trial by legal prosecution), and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king" (v. 10)—thus even in "the place of judgment wickedness was there," Eccl. 3. 16.

Here was a woman who sowed sin with both hands. She not only led Ahab deeper into iniquity, but she dragged the elders and nobles of the city into the mire of her devil-inspired crime. She made the sons of Belial, the false witnesses, even worse than they were before. She became both a robber and a murderess, stealing from Naboth both his good name and heritage. The elders and nobles of Israel were base enough to carry out her orders—sure sign was this that the kingdom was ripe for judgment: when those in high places are godless and conscienceless, it will not be long ere the wrath of the Lord falls on those over whom they preside. At the instigation of those nobles and elders, Naboth was "carried forth out of the city and stoned with stones that he died" (v. 13)—his sons also suffering a similar fate (2 Kings 9:26), that the entail (ownership) might be cut off.

"And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it" (vv. 15, 16). Jezebel was permitted to carry out her vile scheme and Ahab to acquire the coveted vineyard. By his action he testified his approval of all that had been done, and thus became sharer of its guilt. There is a class of people who refuse personally to commit crime, yet scruple not to use their employees and hired agents to do so, and then take advantage of their villainies to enrich themselves. Let such conscienceless rascals and all who consider themselves shrewd in sharing unrighteous gains know that in God's sight they are partakers of the sins of those who did the dirty work for them and will yet be punished accordingly. Many another since the days of Ahab and Jezebel has been allowed to reach the goal of his lusts even at the price of fraud, lying, dishonesty and cruel bloodshed. But in due course each shall discover that "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment" (Job. 20:5).

Meanwhile the Lord God had been a silent spectator of the whole transaction with respect to Naboth. He knew its atrocity, however disguised by the impious semblance of religion and law. As He is infinitely superior to kings and dictators, so He is qualified to call them to account; and as He is infinitely righteous, He *will* execute judgment upon them without respect to persons.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**Ahab will go down in history as a wicked and idolatrous king so why then did the Lord bless him and give him victory over the forces of Benhadad?**

**From what you know about Jezebel in the Old Testament elaborate on what is being said to the Church of Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29.**

**Was Naboth right in refusing the king to purchase his vineyard?**

### **1 Kings 21:17-20a**

"And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it," (1 Kings 21:16). The coveted object (see v. 2) should now be seized. Its lawful owner was dead, brutally murdered by Ahab's acquiescence, and being king, who was there to hinder him enjoying his ill-gotten gain? Picture him delighting himself in his new acquisition, planning how to use it to best advantage, promising himself much pleasure in this extension of the palace grounds. To such lengths are men allowed to go in their wickedness that at times onlookers are made to wonder if there be such a thing as justice, if after all might be not right. Surely, if there were a God who loved righteousness and possessed the power to prevent flagrant unrighteousness, we should not witness such grievous wrongs inflicted upon the innocent, and such triumphing of the wicked. Ah, that is no new problem, but one which has recurred again and again in the history of this world, a world which lieth in the lap of the Wicked One. It is one of the mystery elements arising out of the conflict between good and evil. It supplies one of the severest tests of our faith in God and His government of this earth.

Ahab's entering into possession of Naboth's vineyard reminds us of a scene described in Daniel 5. There we behold another king, Belshazzar, surrounded by the nobility of his kingdom, engaged in a great feast. He gives orders that the golden and silver vessels which his father had taken out of the temple of Jerusalem should be brought to him. His command was obeyed and the vessels were filled with wine, his wives and concubines drinking from them. Think of it: the sacred utensils of Jehovah's house being put to such a use! How passing strange that a worm of the dust should be suffered to go to such fearful lengths of presumption and impiety! But the Most High was neither ignorant of nor indifferent unto such conduct. Nor can a man's rank exempt him from or provide him any protection against the Divine wrath when God is ready to exercise it. There was none in Samaria who could prevent Ahab's taking possession of Naboth's vineyard, and there was none in Babylon who could hinder Belshazzar desecrating the sacred vessels of Israel's temple, but there was One above who could and did bring each of them to judgment.

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Since retribution does not promptly overtake evildoers, they harden their hearts still further, becoming increasingly reckless, supposing that judgment will never fall upon them. Therein they err, for they are but treasuring up unto themselves "wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). Note well that word, "revelation." The "righteous judgment of God" is now more or less in abeyance, but there is a set time, an appointed "Day," when it shall be made *fully manifest*. The divine vengeance comes slowly, yet it comes nonetheless surely. Nor has God left Himself without plain witness of this. Throughout the course of this world's history He has, every now and then, given a clear and public proof of His "righteous judgment," by making an example of some notorious rebel and evidencing His abhorrence of him in the sight of men. He did so with Ahab, with Belshazzar, and with others since then, and though in the great majority of instances the heavens may be silent and apparently impervious, yet those exceptions are sufficient to show "the heavens *do* rule," and should enable the wronged to possess their souls in patience.

"And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it" (vv. 17, 18). A living, righteous and sin-hating God had observed the wickedness to which Ahab had been a willing party, and determined to pass sentence upon him, employing none other than the stern Tishbite as His mouthpiece. In connection with matters of less moment (importance), junior prophets had been sent to the king a short time before (20:13, 22, 28), but on this occasion none less than the father of the prophets was deemed a suitable agent. It called for a man of great courage and undaunted spirit to confront the king, charging him with his horrid crime and denouncing sentence of death upon him in God's name. Who so well qualified as Elijah for this formidable and perilous undertaking? Herein we may perceive how the Lord reserves the hardest tasks for the most experienced and mature of His servants. Peculiar qualifications are required for special and important missions, and for the development of those qualifications, a rigid apprenticeship has to be served. Alas, that these principles are so little recognized by the churches today.

But let us not be misunderstood at this point. It is not natural endowments, intellectual powers, and educational polish we make reference to. It was vain for David to go forth against the Philistine giant clad in Saul's armor: he knew that, and so discarded it. No, it is spiritual graces and ministerial gifts of which we speak. It was strong faith and the boldness it imparts which this severe ordeal called for: faith not in himself but in his Master. Strong faith, for no ordinary had sufficed. And that faith had been tried and disciplined, strengthened and increased in the school of prayer and on the battlefield of

experience. In the wilds of Gilead, in the loneliness of Cherith, in the exigencies of Zarephath, the prophet had dwelt much in the secret place of the Most High, had learned to know God experimentally, had proved His sufficiency. It was no untried novice that Jehovah called upon to act as His ambassador on this solemn occasion, but one who was "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

On the other hand, we must be careful to place the crown where it properly belongs and ascribe unto God the honor of furnishing and sustaining His servants. We have nothing but what we have received, (1 Cor. 4:7), and the strongest are as weak as water when He withdraws His hand from them. He who calls us must also equip, and extraordinary commissions require extraordinary endowments, which the Lord alone can impart. Tarry ye in Jerusalem, said Christ to the apostles "until ye be endued with power from on high" Luke 24:49). Bold sinners need to be boldly reprov'd, but such firmness and courage must be sought from God. Said He to another of His prophets, "All the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks" (Ezek. 3:7-9). Thus, if we behold Elijah complying promptly with this call, it was because he could say, "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob (Ahab) his transgression" (Micah 3:8).

"Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it." Ahab was not in his palace, but God knew where he had gone and the business with which he would be engaged. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3): nothing can be concealed from Him. Ahab might pride himself that none should ever reprove him for his diabolical conduct, and that now he could enjoy his spoils without hindrance. But sinners, whether of the lowest or the highest rank, are never secure. Their wickedness ascends before God, and He often sends after them when they least expect it. Let none flatter themselves with impunity because they have succeeded in their iniquitous schemes. The day of reckoning is not far distant, even though it should not overtake them in this life. If these lines should be read by one who is far from home, no longer under the eye of loved ones, let him know that he is still under the observation of the Most High. Let that consideration deter him from sinning against Him and against his neighbor. Stand in awe of God's presence, lest some fearful sentence from Him be pronounced upon you, and be brought home to your conscience with such power that you will be a terror to yourself and to all around you.

"And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (v. 19). With no smooth and soothing message was the prophet now sent forth. It was enough to terrify himself: what then must it have meant to the guilty Ahab! It proceeded from Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, the supreme and righteous Governor of the universe, whose omniscient eye is witness to all events and whose omnipotent arm shall arrest and punish all evil doers. It was the word of Him who declares, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:24). For "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves" (Job 34:21,22). It was a word of denunciation, bringing to light the hidden things of darkness. It was a word of accusation, boldly charging Ahab with his crimes. It was a word of condemnation, making known the awful doom which should surely overtake the one who had blatantly trampled upon the divine Law.

It is just such messages which our degenerate age calls for. It is the *lack of them* which has brought about the terrible condition which the world is now in. Mealy-mouthed preachers deceived the fathers, and now their children have turned their backs on the churches. "Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked" (Jer. 23:19). The figure is an awful one: a whirlwind uproots trees, sweeps away houses, and leaves death and desolation in its wake. Who among God's people can doubt that such a whirlwind is now going forth? "The anger of the Lord shall not return, until He have executed, and till He have performed the thoughts of His heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly" (23:20). And why? What is the root cause thereof? This: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (v. 21): false prophets, preachers never called of God, who uttered "lies" in His name (v. 25). Men who rejected the divine Law, ignored the Divine holiness, remained silent about divine wrath. Men who filled the churches with unregenerate members and then amused them with speculations upon prophecy.

It was false prophets who wrought such havoc in Israel, who had corrupted the throne and called down upon the land the sore judgment of God. And throughout the past century the false prophets have corrupted Christendom. As far back as fifty years ago Spurgeon lifted up his voice and used his pen in denouncing the "Downgrade movement" in the churches, and withdrew his tabernacle from the Baptist Union. After his death things went rapidly from bad to worse and now "a whirlwind of the Lord" is sweeping away the flimsy structures the religious world erected. Everything is now in the melting pot and only the genuine gold will survive the fiery trial. And what can the true servants of God do? Lift up their voices, "Cry aloud, and spare not" (Isa. 58:1). Do as Elijah did: fearlessly denounce sin in high places.

A message pleasant to deliver? No, far from it. A message likely to be popular with the hearers? No, the very reverse. But a message sorely needed and criminally neglected. Did the Lord Jesus preach a sermon in the temple on the love of God while its sacred precincts were being made a den of thieves? Yet this is what thousands of those who pose as His servants have been doing for the last two or three generations. With flaming eye and scourge in hand, the

Redeemer drove out from His Father's House the traffickers who deified it. Those who were the true servants of Christ refused to use carnal methods for adding numbers of nominal professors to their membership. Those who were the true servants of Christ proclaimed the unchanging demands of a holy God, insisted on the enforcing of a scriptural discipline, and resigned their pastorates when their flocks rebelled. The religious powers-that-be were glad to see the back of them, while their ministerial brethren, so far from seeking to strengthen their hands, did all they could to injure them and cared not if they starved to death.

But those servants of Christ were few in number, a negligible minority. The great bulk of "pastors" were hirelings, time-servers, holders of an easy and lucrative job at any price. They carefully trimmed their sails, and deliberately omitted from their preaching anything which would be distasteful unto their ungodly hearers. The people of God in their congregations were famished, though few of them dared to take their pastors to task, following the line of least resistance. And the very passage from which we have quoted above declares, "but *if they had* stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings" (Jer. 23:22). But they did not, and therefore "a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind." Can we wonder at it? God will not be mocked. It is the churches who are responsible for it, and there is no denomination, no party, no circle of fellowship that can plead innocence.

"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (v. 20). With what consternation must the king have beheld him! The prophet would be the last man he wished or expected to see, believing that Jezebel's threat had frightened him away so that he would be troubled by him no more. Perhaps Ahab thought that he had fled to some distant country or was in his grave by this time: but here he stood before him. The king was evidently startled and dismayed by the sight of Elijah. His conscience would smite him for his base wickedness, and the very place of their present meeting would add to his discomfort. He therefore could not look on the Tishbite without terror and fearful foreboding that some dire threat of vengeance was at hand from Jehovah. In his fright and annoyance he cried, "Hast thou found me?" Am I now tracked down? A guilty heart can never be at peace. Had he not been conscious of how ill he deserved at the hands of God, he would not have greeted His servant as "O mine enemy." It was because his heart condemned him as an enemy of God that he was so disconcerted at being confronted by His ambassador.

"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Such a reception is all that the faithful servant of God must expect at the hands of the wicked, especially from unregenerate religious professors. They will regard him as a disturber of the peace, a troubler of those who wish to be comfortable in their sins. They who are engaged in evil doing are annoyed at him who detects them, whether he be a minister of Christ or a policeman. The Scriptures are detested because they denounce sin in every form. Romanism hates the Bible because it exposes her hypocrisies. The impenitent look upon those as their *friends* who speak smooth things to them and help them to deceive themselves. "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly" (Amos 5:10). Hence it was that the apostle declared, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10)—how few servants of Christ are left! The minister's duty is to be faithful to his Master, and if he pleases *Him*, what matter it though he be despised and detested by the whole religious world? Blessed are they whom men shall revile for Christ's sake.

At this point we would say to any young man who is seriously contemplating entering the ministry, Abandon such a prospect at once if you are not prepared to be treated with contempt and made "as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4:13). The public service of Christ is the last place for those who wish to be popular with their fellows. A young minister once complained to an older one, "My church is making a regular doormat of me," to which he received the reply, "If the Son of God condescended to become the Door surely it is not beneath you to be made a door mat." If you are not prepared for elders and deacons to wipe their feet on you, shun the ministry. And to those already in it we would say, Unless your preaching stirs up strife and brings down persecution and contumacy (defiance) upon you, there is something seriously lacking in it. If your preaching is the enemy of hypocrisy, of carnality, of worldliness, of empty profession, of all that is contrary to vital godliness, then you must be regarded as the enemy of those you oppose.

"And he answered, I have found thee." Elijah was not a man who wore his heart on his sleeve. It took a good deal more than a frown to deter, or an angry word to peeve him. So far from being "hurt" and turning away to sulk, he replied like a man. He took up Ahab on his own terms and said, "Yes, I have found thee." I have found thee as a thief and murderer in another's vineyard. It is a good sign when the self-convicted one denounces God's servant as his "enemy," for it shows the preacher has hit the mark, his message has gone home to the conscience; "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23), says God, and so Adam, Cain, Achan, Ahab, Gehazi, Ananias proved. Let none think they shall escape divine retribution: if punishment be not inflicted in this life, it most certainly will be in the next, unless we cease fighting against God and flee to Christ for refuge. "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14, 15).

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**How has this story progressed in terms of the character of Ahab and the character of Elijah?**

"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord" (1 Kings 21:20). We have already considered Ahab's question and the first part of the prophet's reply; we turn now to look at the solemn charge which he proffered against the king. "Because thou hast *sold thyself to work evil* in the sight of the Lord." Here we may observe how essential it is that we note particularly each word of Holy Writ, for if we read this verse carelessly we shall fail to distinguish sharply between it and an expression used in the New Testament, which, though similar in sound, is vastly different in sense. In Romans 7:14 we find the apostle declares, "But I am carnal, *sold under sin*." That statement has puzzled quite a few, and some have so misunderstood its force that they have confounded it with the prophet's terrible indictment against Ahab. It may be somewhat of a digression, yet numbers of our readers will probably welcome a few expository comments upon the difference in meaning of these two expressions.

It will be noted that Romans 7:14 begins with the affirmation, "For we know that the law is spiritual," which among other things means, it legislates for the soul as well as the body, its demands reaching beyond the mere outward act to the motive which prompted it and the spirit in which it is performed; in a word, it requires *inward* conformity and purity. Now as the apostle measured himself by the high and holy requirements of God's law, he declared, "but I am carnal." That was not said by way of self-extenuation, to excuse his coming so far short of the divine standard set before us, but in self-condemnation because of his lack of conformity thereto. That is the sorrowful confession of every honest Christian. "I am carnal" expresses what the believer is in himself by nature: though born from above, yet the "flesh" in him has not been improved to the slightest degree. Nor is that true of the believer only when he has suffered some fall: he is always "carnal," for there is no getting rid of the old nature; though he is not always conscious of this humiliating fact. The more the Christian grows in grace the more does he realize his carnality—that the "flesh" pollutes his holiest exercises and best performances.

"Sold under sin." This does not mean that the saint gives up himself to be the willing slave of sin, but that he finds himself in the case or experience of a slave, of one whose master requires him to do things against his own inclinations. The literal rendering of the Greek is "having been sold under sin," that is, at the Fall, in which condition we continue to the end of our earthly course. "Sold" so as to be under the power of sin, for the old nature is never made holy. The apostle speaks of what he finds himself, what he is before God, and not of what he appeared in the sight of men. His "old man" was thoroughly opposed to God's law. There was an evil principle in him against which he struggled, from which he longed to be delivered, but which continued to exert its fearful potency. Notwithstanding the grace he had received, he found himself far, far from being perfect, and in all respects unable to attain thereunto, though longing after it. It was while measuring himself by the Law, which requires perfect love, that he realized how far short he came of it.

"Sold under sin": indwelling corruption holds the believer back. The more spiritual progress he is enabled to make, the more he discovers his handicap. It is like a man journeying uphill with a heavy load on his back: the farther he proceeds the more conscious does he become of that burden. But how is this to be harmonized with "sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14)? Thus: though indwelling sin tyrannizes the believer, it by no means prevails over him totally and completely. Sin reigns over the sinner, having an absolute and undisputed dominion over him, but not so with the saint. Yet it so far plagues as to prevent his attaining unto perfection, which is what he craves: (see Phil. 3:12). From the standpoint of the new nature and as God sees him in Christ, the believer is spiritual; but from the standpoint of the old nature and as God sees him in himself, he is "carnal." As a child of Adam he is "sold under sin," as a child of God he "delights in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). The acts of a slave are indeed his own acts, yet not being performed with the full consent of his will and delight of his heart they are not a fair test of his disposition and desires.

Vastly different was the case of Ahab from that which we have briefly sketched above: so far from being brought into captivity against his will, he had "sold himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." Deliberately and without limit, Ahab wholly gave himself up unto all manner of wickedness in open defiance of the Almighty. As Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15), and therefore freely hired himself unto Balak to curse the people of God, as Judas coveted the silver of the chief priests, sought them out and covenanted to betray the Savior unto them (Matthew 26:14, 15), so this apostate king "sold himself to work evil" without compunction or reserve. His horrible crime in respect of Naboth was no detached act contrary to the general tenor or course of his life, as David's sin in the matter of Uriah had been, but was simply a specimen of his continual rebellion against God. "Having sold himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord, as if in contempt and defiance of Him, he was openly, constantly, and diligently employed in it as a slave in his master's business," (Thomas Scott).

"Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." His downward course commenced when he *married Jezebel* (v. 25), a heathen, an idolater, and the consequences of that horrible union are recorded for our learning. They stand out as a red light, a danger signal, a solemn warning to the people of God today. The law expressly forbade an Israelite to marry a Gentile, and the New Testament just as definitely prohibits a Christian from marrying a worldling. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). It is at his or her peril that any Christian willfully treads under foot this Divine commandment, for deliberate disobedience is certain to incur the marked displeasure of God. For a child of His to enter the state of wedlock with an unbeliever is to make Christ have concord with Belial (2 Cor. 6:15). When a Christian man marries a worldling, a son of God becomes united to a daughter of Satan. What a horrible combination!

In no uncertain tones did Elijah denounce Ahab for his defiant union with Jezebel and all the evils it had brought in its train. "Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." That is the prime business of God's servant: to make known the indignation and judgment of Heaven against sin. God is the enemy of sin. He is "angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). His wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18). That wrath is the antagonism of holiness to evil, of consuming fire to that which is incapable of sustaining it. It is the business of God's servant to declare and make known the awful case and course of the sinner, that those who are not for Christ are against Him, that he who is not walking with God is fighting against Him, that he who is not yielding himself to His service is serving the Devil. Said the Lord Jesus, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34), complying with the orders of his master, the slave of his lusts, yet the willing slave, delighting therein. It is not a service which has been forced upon him against his desires, but one into which he has voluntarily sold himself and in which he voluntarily remains. And therefore it is a criminal servitude for which he must be judged.

This, then, was the ordeal which confronted Elijah, and in essence it confronts every servant of Christ today. He was the bearer of an unwelcome message. He was required to confront the ungodly king and tell him to his face precisely what he was in the sight of a sin-hating God. It is a task which calls for firmness of mind and boldness of heart. It is a task which demands that the glory of God shall override all sentimental considerations. It is a task which claims the support and cooperation of all God's people. Let them do and say nothing to discourage the minister in the faithful discharge of his office. Let them be far from saying, "Prophecy not unto us right things: speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. 30:10). Rather, let the people of God pray earnestly that the spirit of Elijah may rest upon their ministers, that they may be enabled to open their mouths "with all boldness" (Acts 4:29), that they may keep back nothing which is profitable, that they may shun not to declare all the counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27). Let them see to it that there be no failure to hold up their hands in the day of battle (Ex. 17:12). Ah, my reader, it makes a tremendous difference when the minister knows he has the support of a praying people. How far is the pew responsible for the state of the pulpit today?

"Behold, I will bring evil upon thee" (v. 21). It is the business of God's servant not only to paint in its true colors the course which the sinner has chosen to follow, but to make known the inevitable consequence of such a course. First and negatively, they who have sold themselves to work evil in the sight of the Lord "have sold themselves for *nought*" (Isa. 52:3). Satan has assured them that by engaging in his service they shall be greatly the gainers, that by giving free rein to their lusts they shall be merry and enjoy life. But he is a liar, as Eve discovered at the beginning. Of those who sell themselves to work evil it may be inquired, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not?" (Isa. 55:2). There is no contentment of mind, no peace of conscience, no real joy of heart to be obtained by indulging the flesh, but rather the wrecking of health and the storing up of misery. Oh, what a wretched bargain is this: to sell ourselves "for nought"! To squander our substance in riotous living and then come to woeful want. To render full obedience to the dictates of sin and receive only kicks and cuffs in return. What madness to serve such a master!

But the servant of God has a still more painful duty to perform, and that is to announce the positive side of the consequences of selling ourselves to work evil in the sight of the Lord. Sin pays terrible wages, my reader. It is doing so at this present moment in the world's history. The horrors of war, with all the untold suffering and anguish they entail, is the wages of sin now being paid out to the nations, and those nations which have sinned against the greatest light and privileges are the ones receiving the heaviest installments. And is it not meet it should be so? Yes, a "just recompense of reward" (Heb. 2:2), is what the Word of Truth designates it. And identically the same principle pertains to the individual: unto every one who sells himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord His rejoinder is, "Behold, I will bring evil upon thee," dire judgment which shall overwhelm and utterly consume. This, too, is the duty of God's servant: solemnly to declare unto every rebel against God, irrespective of his rank, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die" (Ezek. 33:8), and that same verse goes on to tell us that God will yet say unto the watchman that failed in his duty, "his blood will I require at thine hand." Oh, to be able to say with Paul, "I am pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26).

"And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou has provoked Me to anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat" (vv. 22-24). The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceeding small. For many years Ahab defied Jehovah but now the day of reckoning was nigh at hand, and when it dawned, divine judgment would fall not only upon the apostate king and his vile consort but upon their family as well; so that his evil house should be utterly exterminated. Is it not written, "the name of the wicked shall rot" (Prov. 10:7)? We are here supplied with an awe-inspiring illustration of that solemn principle in the governmental dealings of God: "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Ex. 20:5). Behold here the justice of God in making Ahab reap as he had sown: not only had he consented unto the death of Naboth (21:8), but the sons of Naboth also had been slain (2 Kings 9:26), hence divine retribution was visited not only upon Ahab and Jezebel but on their children too.

"And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah." In declaring that He would make the house of Ahab like unto that of two other wicked kings who preceded him, God announced the total destruction of his descendants, and that by a violent end. For the house of Jeroboam—whose dynasty lasted barely twenty-four years—we read, "He smote all the house of Jeroboam: he left not to Jeroboam any that

breathed, until He had destroyed him, (1 Kings 15:29); while of Baasha—whose dynasty lasted only just over a quarter of a century—we are told, "He left him not one male, neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends" (1 Kings 16:11). Probably one reason why the fearful doom which overtook the families of his predecessors as here specifically mentioned, was to emphasize still further the enormity of Ahab's conduct—that he had failed to take to heart those recent judgments of God. It greatly aggravates our sins when we refuse to heed the solemn warnings which history records of the unmistakable judgments of God upon other evildoers, as the guilt of our generation is so much the greater through disregarding the clarion call made by the war of 1914-18 for the nations to turn from their wickedness and return to the God of their fathers.

And what was the effect produced upon Ahab by this message from Jehovah? Disconcerted and displeased he was on first beholding the prophet, yet when he heard the awful sentence he was deeply affected: "he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly" (v. 27). He made no effort to silence Elijah by self-vindication. His conscience smote him for approving the murderous act. He knew well that connivance at wickedness by those in authority, who ought to restrain it, is justly visited upon themselves as their own deed; that the receiver of stolen goods is as bad as the thief. He was abashed and abased. God can make the stoutest sinner to tremble and the most arrogant humble himself. But all is not gold that glitters. There may be a great outward show of repentance without the heart being changed. Many have been made afraid of God's wrath who would not part with their sins. It is to be carefully noted there is no hint that Ahab put away Jezebel or restored the worship of the Lord.

That which is recorded here of Ahab is both solemn and instructive. Solemn, because it sounds a warning against being deceived by appearances. Ahab made no effort to justify his crimes nor did he lay violent hands on Elijah. Nay more: he humbled himself, and by his outward acts acknowledged the justice of the divine sentence. What more could we ask? Ah, that is the all-important point. External amendment of our ways, though good in itself, is not sufficient: "rend your heart, and not your garments" (Joel 2:13), is what a holy God requires. A hypocrite may go far in the outward performance of holy duties. The most hardened sinners are capable of reforming for a season: (Mark 6:20; John 5:35). How many wicked persons have, in times of danger and desperate illness, abased themselves before God, but returned to their evil ways as soon as restored to health. Ahab's humiliation was but superficial and transient, being occasioned by fear of judgment and not a heart hatred of his sins. Nothing is said of his restoring the vineyard to Naboth's heirs or next of kin, and where righting of wrongs is absent we must always seriously suspect the repentance. Later we find him saying of a servant of God, "I hate him" (22:8), which is clear proof that he had undergone no change of heart.

Instructive also is the case of Ahab, for it throws light on God's governmental dealings with individuals in this life. Though the king's repentance was but superficial, yet inasmuch as it was a public or visible humbling of himself before God, He was so far owned and honored, and an abatement of His sentence was obtained: "Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but in his son's days" (v. 29)—he was spared the anguish of witnessing the slaughter of his children and the complete extermination of his house. But there was no repeal of the divine sentence upon himself. Nor was the king able to avoid God's stroke, though he made attempt to do so (22:30). The Lord had said "in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood" (1 Kings 21:19), and we are told "so the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armor, according unto the word of the Lord" (vv. 37, 38). He who sells himself to sin must receive the wages of sin. For the doom which overtook Ahab's family see 2 Kings 9:25; 10:6, 7, 13, 14, 17.

"And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying. The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (21:23). No vain threats were those which the prophet uttered, but announcements of Divine judgment which were fulfilled not long after. Jezebel outlived her husband for some years but her end was just as Elijah had foretold. True to her depraved character we find that on the very day of her death "she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window" to attract attention, 2 Kings 9:30.

She was thrown out of the window by some of her own attendants, her blood sprinkling the wall, and her corpse being ruthlessly trampled under foot. A short time after, when orders were given for her burial, so thoroughly had the dogs done their work that naught remained but "the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands" (2 Kings 9:35). God is as faithful and true in making good *His threatenings* as He is in fulfilling His promises.

After the death of Ahab the judgments of God began to fall heavily upon his family. Of his immediate successor we are told, "Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. And 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 made Israel to sin: For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done" (1 Kings 22:51-53). Unspeakably solemn is that. The three and a half years' famine, the exposure of Baal's impotence, the slaying of his prophets there on Carmel, and the awe-inspiring dealings of God with his father, were all known to Ahaziah, but they produced no salutary effect upon him, for he refused to take them to heart. Heedless of those dire warnings he went on recklessly in sin, continuing to "serve Baal and worship him." His heart was fully set in him to do evil, and therefore was he cut off in his youth; nevertheless even in his case mercy was mingled with justice, for "space for repentance" was granted him ere he was removed from this scene.

(Elijah, A. W. Pink)

**Show how we are “sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14) and then harmonize this fact with “sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom. 6:14).**

Isa. 52:1-3

John 8:34-36

Rom. 7:15-25

Phil. 3:12

2 Pet. 2:15

**Although Ahab humbled himself before God; “he tore his cloths and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning” (1 Kings 21:27) did he have a true repentant heart?**

1 Kings 22:8    Mark 6:20    John 5:35

### **1 Kings 22:1-53**

It seems strange that so good a man as the king of Judah should have entered into such an alliance. It began with the marriage of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, and Athaliah, Ahab's daughter; but it was a terrible descent from the high standing of a servant of Jehovah for Jehoshaphat to say to a practically heathen king: "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." Partnerships like this, either in marriage or in business, are not only absolutely forbidden, but they are disastrous in their ultimate outworking. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," 2 Cor. 6:14.

Micaiah stands out in splendid contrast. His was the proud honor of being hated by Ahab, as was John the Baptist by Herod. But the prophet in his dungeon, with the bread and water of affliction, was a happier man by far than the king, though clad in royal robes and held in high respect. Is it not clear that Ahab, in his heart of hearts, feared this man of God? We shall see that he put off his royal robes and dressed in a common uniform, that he might evade the death that Micaiah predicted as his fate. Of course it did not avail. God cannot be evaded in that way. His purpose is irresistible.

Ramoth was one of the cities of refuge, situated across the Jordan. The false prophets spake as they knew would please the king and gain the popular ear. But Micaiah did not scruple to say that the spirit of a demon was making use of their lips for the utterance of beguiling falsehood. He was evidently speaking metaphorically. By an ironical method of speech he suggested that the voices of such prophets were not to be accepted as truth. He knew well enough God's living voice. In the silence and solitude of his prison, shut away from all the world besides, he had learned to detect the accent of truth, and could easily discriminate between it and the lying boasts of the false prophets. We must try the spirits, whether they be of God, 1 John 4:1. Beware of being beguiled by every voice that speaks in your heart. God's voice almost always calls you to take up the cross and stand alone against the crowd. It summons to the straight gate and the narrow way.

"*Carry him back!*" cried the king. He hated the man of God, as the thief dreads a watch-dog. But better a thousand times be in that dungeon with Micaiah than faring sumptuously at Ahab's table. Do not hide yourself from the truth. Let it search, though it hurt you. It will save you from the unerring arrow.

The cup of Ahab's sins was full, and the arrow at a venture executed divine retribution. Had Micaiah not spoken, men would have attributed this apparently chance arrow to misfortune; now, however, it became invested with quite another significance. There is no such thing as chance in this world. The bird does not fall to the ground, the arrow does not find its way to the heart, without a superintending Providence. Whether you live or die, your life is under the immediate supervision of the Almighty. In the battlefield, not a single bullet can hit your beloved, apart from the permitting providence of God. All is under law.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand in the evil day. Take the shield of faith, as covering your whole being, lest the joints of the armor open to the fiery darts of your foe. Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. Note the contrast in the end of these men. The one went to his own place; no disguise could avert his doom. The other seems to have returned to God, v. 32 and 2 Chron. 18:31, and God gave him years of rest, victory, and prosperity, of which further details are given in 2 Chron. 19 and 20.

Further details of Jehoshaphat's good reign are given in 2 Chron. 17-20. He made strenuous efforts to rid the land of the more obvious evils that disgraced it, though some of the abuses seemed too deeply rooted even for his strong hand, v. 42. The great defect of Jehoshaphat's character was the ease with which he associated himself with Ahab and his family; for this subsequent generations paid a heavy penalty, 2 Kings 11.

Jehoshaphat attempted to re-open the sea-commerce with Ophir, and entered into partnership with Ahaziah to build ships in Solomon's old port of Ezion-geber, to make the circuit of Africa *en route* for Spain. But, as we learn from 2 Chron. 20:37, a prophet of Jehovah remonstrated with him for renewing the alliance with the king of Israel; and the storm that shattered the ships on the rocks, before they set sail, gave evidence of the displeasure of the Almighty. Let us beware of these alliances and partnerships with the ungodly. Sooner or later they meet with disaster. God blocks our path and defeats our plans; and if only we are led to repentance, our broken ships may give us cause for thanksgiving in eternity.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

### **Comment on 1 Kings 22:21-23.**

1 Sam. 16:14, 18:10, 19:9

Job 12:16

Ezek. 14:7-10

2 Thess. 2:210-12

Jam. 1:13-14



**The United Kingdom  
(about 1020-926 B. C.)**

Saul  
David

Solomon

**The Divided Kingdom  
(about 926-586 BC)**

The Northern Kingdom			
Kings of ISRAEL	Duration of Reign	Writing Prophets	Historical Record
Jeroboam I	<i>Years</i> 22		<i>I Kings</i> 12-14
Nadab	2		15
Baasha	24		15; 16
Elah	2		16
Zimri	<i>7 days</i>		16
Omri	12		16
Ahab	22		16-22
Ahaziah	2		22
Jehoram	12		<i>II Kings</i> 3; 9
Jehu	28		9; 10; 12
Jehoahaz	17		13
Jehoash	16		13
Jeroboam II	41	Jonah Amos Hosea	14
Zachariah	<i>6 months</i>	Hosea	15
Shallum	<i>1 month</i>	Hosea	15
Menahem	10	Hosea	15
Pekahiah	2	Hosea	15
Peka	20	Hosea	15; 16
Hoshea	9	Hosea	17

**Assyrian Captivity  
722/721 B.C.**

The Southern Kingdom			
Kings of JUDAH	Duration of Reign	Writing Prophets	Historical Record
Rehoboam	<i>Years</i> 17		<i>I Kings</i> 12-14
Abijam	3		15
Asa	41		15
Jehoshaphat	25		22
Jehoram	8		<i>II Kings</i> 8
Ahaziah	1		8; 9
Athaliah	6	Obadiah (?)	11
Joash	40	Joel (?)	12; 13
Amaziah	29		14
Azariah (Uzziah)	52	Isaiah	15
Jotham	16	Isaiah Micah	15
Ahaz	16	Isaiah Micah	16
Hezekiah	29	Isaiah Micah	18-20
Manasseh	55		21
Amon	2		21
Josiah	31	Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Jeremiah	22; 23
Jehoahaz	<i>3 months</i>	Jeremiah	23
Jehoiakim	11	Jeremiah Daniel	23; 24
Jehoiachin	<i>3 months</i>	Jeremiah Daniel Ezekiel	24
Zedekiah	11	Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel Obadiah (?)	24; 25

**Babylonian Captivity  
587/586 B.C.**