
History and Prophecy

Part 3

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This is Part 3 of a series on the subject of history and prophecy and looking at history as a foundation to the understanding of prophecy. I began this series at the beginning of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, the split between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, right after the death of King Solomon and began to move forward from that point because most of the prophets that you are going to read about, that are important in the Bible, come on the scene, subsequent to that, and they really grow out of the events of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, that followed the death of Solomon and the changes that took place in those kingdoms at that time.

We went through the history of what was actually happening all the way up to the beginning of the Ministry of a man named Elijah. Probably the most important of all of the prophets who have ever lived. And yet we have not one recorded writing of this man. We generally think in terms of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as being the major prophets because they are the three most prolific writers among the prophets. They have had enormous amounts of their works preserved for us in the pages of Scripture. Somebody wrote down Elijah's words, but Elijah had so little to say that there was not a lot to write down. If you put all of his words together, you may have a little more than the shortest of the minor prophets. Yet he still turns out to be the major prophet of all history.

I want you to turn over with me to the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. This is a strange place to go in studying the history of Israel, isn't it? Not really, because at this point, we begin to understand the significance of this man Elijah.

Luke 1:5 "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. {6} And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. {7} And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. {8} And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course." All of the priesthood was divided into a series of 24 courses, like a group of watches, one group would have a watch this week and another course would have a watch next week. They circled through the year, a different group of men taking care of the Temple together at certain times, and then they would have certain times that they were off. This was Zacharias' time to be on.

In the Spirit and Power of Elijah

Luke 1:9 "According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot (job) was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. {10} And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the time of incense. {11} There appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. {12} And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. {13} But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. {14} You shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. {15} For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. {16} And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. {17} And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah." The "him" in this case is the Messiah. "To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

This is very interesting because it is a specific reference to a very specific prophecy, the one back in Malachi. He is in citing Malachi 4 and verse five: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet." Notice that he doesn't even say "One in the spirit and power of Elijah." He says, "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Now it is interesting that John the Baptist, Jesus will later tell us that he was Elijah, who was for to come, and yet we all know that he was not Elijah and when he was asked if he was Elijah, he answered "No", and indeed he was not. And yet Jesus said, "If you can understand it, if you can receive it, this was Elijah which was for to come." this is very enigmatic, very contradictory, almost in all of its terminology unless you understand the principle of type and antitype, of duality, that John the Baptist was a 'type' of one who is to come at the end time, and that Elijah, indeed, was a 'type' of one who was to come at the end time.

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: {6} And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

Now, God was not going to raise Elijah from the dead and send Elijah at the end time, any more than He would raise Elijah from the dead and send him to proceed Jesus into the streets of Nazareth, Cana, Jerusalem.

Luke 1:17 "He shall go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah." There are two aspects of this. One is the spirit of Elijah and the other is the power of Elijah, and I think that there is probably a distinction to be made between the two, because when we think of spirit, we talk in terms of spirit, we are talking in terms of the attitude, the frame of mind, the approach, the way in which the Holy Spirit expresses itself through an individual. When we speak of the power of Elijah, we're talking about his ability to call fire down from heaven, and his ability to pray and have it not to rain for a period of three- and one-half years. We are talking about miraculous power.

Interestingly enough, John the Baptist was not a miracle working prophet. The power of Elijah seems strangely absent from his ministry, and yet the spirit of Elijah was definitely there. How and why and what does it all mean?

Elijah

Now it seems strange that anyone should try to understand this without grasping something about this man Elijah, and his ministry, who he was, why he was, what he was supposed to do? How in the world can we expect to understand or even hope to understand the 'antitype', unless we understand the 'type' or model? So consequently I think it is very important that we go back to First Kings the 17th chapter and verse one and introduce ourselves to a man named Elijah, so that we can understand that when he says "One shall come in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to the children", then we have at least a hint of what it is we are dealing with.

1 Kings 17:1 "Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab the king, As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." And then he disappeared. He was not seen by Ahab or anyone in Israel for three- and one-half years. Now do you see what I mean about this man not having written a lot of prophecy for someone to sit down and study and ponder upon. It really isn't difficult to grasp, what Isaiah has had to say, his words are not line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little or there a little. He just stands up and raises his hand to heaven and says, "As the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Now is there anybody who doesn't understand that? No one can fail to grasp the meaning of that statement. We have a man of few words, a blunt man. He was from across Jordan. If you check the maps in the back of your Bible, you will find Gilead is across Jordan in the region of Manasseh. We are not told specifically that Elijah was a Manassite, but it is the logical conclusion, when we look at the geographical area from which he came.

He was a man of the tribe of Manasseh who dwelt among the Manassites of whom God called, who marches down across the River Jordan, comes all the way up to find Ahab. He looks him in the eye and says, "There is not going to be any dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." No fanfare. He just seems to come out of nowhere with a prophecy. Elijah comes in a very definite historical conflict. He is in conflict with clearly defined historical characters. We have gotten to where we are now in this particular part of prophecy through a stated sequence of historical events which are highly irrelevant to what Elijah has just done. He hasn't done it for any reason.

So why is Israel being punished? Surprisingly little is said up to this point about moral decay or about sins of the flesh. There are isolated incidences of the sins of the flesh, which are punished, but this is not given as the reason for the national punishment of these people.

Ahab

Let's take a look at the preceding chapter, First Kings 16 and let's introduce ourselves to this man Ahab and see what is said, and why it is during his reign that Elijah is called and sent. Why is

this prophet chosen at this time in history with this message for this king? We must consider this if we are to understand what is going on.

1 Kings 16:28 "So Omri slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned in his stead. {29} And in the thirty eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years."

The total history of the ten northern tribes will span approximately 230 years. At this point, we are 58 years deep into the history of the ten tribes. This is about 58 years since Jeroboam broke with Rehoboam and established a different form of worship, moved the festival of Feast of Tabernacles to the fifteenth day of the eighth month and set up calves in Bethel and Dan, and said these are your gods Oh Israel and the people began to worship the calves in both of these places.

Fifty-eight years since he made priests of the lowest of the people. Fifty-eight years since God sent a prophet to prophesy against that altar and had a couple of profound signs to demonstrate to Jeroboam that he was telling the truth. Fifty-eight years into the history. We also, I might add, about 100 years before the first of the serious writing prophets, whose name was Amos. You're still very early in the history of these people

1 Kings 16:30: "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD." He will however reign from the year 58 to year 80 in the history of these people. "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, above all that were before him."

Now you can collect the whole gang of the kings of the northern ten tribes up to Ahab and when you total up all the things that they had done, Ahab had done more evil than all of them before him.

Verse 31 "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."

Now I told you when we started out on the series that we would hear that phrase again and again and again, "The sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who did sin and who made all Israel to sin." This comes up again and again and again. Shall we remind ourselves what that was ?

The Sins of Jeroboam

Jeroboam changed God's Holy Days. He set up the festival on the 15th day of the eighth month rather than the 15th day of the seventh month. He changed the place where God was to be worshiped by setting up calves in Bethel and in Dan and insisted that the people go to one of these two places and he made priests of the lowest of the people. He actually set himself up almost as a priest and began to offer offerings himself in these places' contrary to the law. So, what this man did essentially was to step in and change the form of the worship of God. He was not at this point in time, in this initial step, introducing a totally foreign religious system. It wasn't that they were rejecting God altogether, but they changed the form and the time and the

place and the method and the circumstances and even the personnel involved in the worship of God. That's what he did. It is called a sin in which he caused all Israel to sin and it is repeated again and again and again throughout the history of these people as a major fundamental reason for the destruction of these people.

1 Kings 16:31 "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. {32} He reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. {33} 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."

Now I have no doubt that there were sins of the flesh involved in Ahab's reign. I have no doubt that there were all sorts of moral decay that began to show up all over the place. I have no doubt that there were many bad things that were happening in Israel, but none of them are mentioned. None of them are singled out. None of them are called out and emblazoned on the wall for all of us to see as the reason why these things were happening. Elijah the Tishbite walks on the scene, looks Ahab in the face and said, "There's not going to be any rain as God lives for the next three-and one-half years except as I say so", and then he leaves.

The reason for that was because this man went into deeper idolatry than any king before him and turned completely to the worship of Baal. It was a violation of the First Commandment not the tenth, that finally got all this together to where God says, "Elijah is going to do the work that he is going to do."

History of Israel

I want us to think about the history of Israel up to this point. Saul seems to be almost irrelevant in the pattern of things as they develop and as they were going to be down through the years to come along.

When we come to David, we have a pure monotheist. David believed in one God. He trusted God explicitly and tried to obey Him and even with all of his mistakes and errors and whatever he did, when the time came for the prophet to speak to Jeroboam about his sins, God said "You have not done what is right in my eyes as my servant David did." God seems to have completely forgotten all of the errors, faults and mistakes of David and remembers one thing about David and one thing only, that he was a pure monotheist. He worshiped Jehovah. I still love the feeling of that word Jehovah, it can make the hair stand up on the back of my arms, whereas the name Yahweh, which is Hebrew, just doesn't quite have the same effect. But David really believed that the Eternal was God, and that there was no other.

It never crossed David's mind to doubt God. Now there were times in which he made mistakes. I think he just didn't think. I don't think he gave much consideration, as most of us do frankly, whenever we are about to make some stupid mistake. We usually decide, consciously or unconsciously, not to think about what we are doing at all. We just charge off and do it and afterward we get filled with remorse, and we go back and think about what we did, and we say,

"I shouldn't have done that. Why did I do that? What a terrible thing I did." David was just like us in that regard. He just didn't think, but when he did think, he had absolutely no question about who was God. He repented toward God and not some other god. He never corrupted the worship of God and he is called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). The sins of the flesh, the errors he made, the mistakes he made were all forgotten. God considers him not only a good man, but He considers him a righteous man and holds him up as an example for all of the world as a man after God's own heart.

Then we come to King Solomon. I would call Solomon a closet monotheist in his later years. He built the temple for God. He trusted God implicitly and was a powerful man of faith in his earlier years. He began to marry and multiply wives to himself. He built a temple to Molech for one wife, and then he built a temple to Dagon for another wife and for another wife he built a grove planted with all the nice landscaping for her over there and he would go through all of this rigamarole.

I really have no question in my mind that Solomon in his private chambers with one of his closest friends probably cracked jokes about Dagon being a little fishy and Molech being a grease ball and other sundry expressions that he probably would've chosen for these gods of his wives but he wouldn't dare say it where they would hear it, or in public, or in circumstance that would allow it. I don't think Solomon had any doubts about who God was. The problem was that people couldn't tell that, because Solomon did not feel free to make a public pronouncement about what he really believed. He did not feel free, because of his wives to destroy all these things and get them out of the land. And so, in the eyes of the people, the eternal God became one of the boys, one of many gods, perhaps no better than any of the others, or He might have been the best of the lot, but He was only the best not the only. The people, the men on the street, began to be confused about God as Solomon multiplied temples and shrines and the introduction of other religious practices, in addition to the worship of God, was a common thing. The celebration of other festivals and other days, when Solomon closed businesses down, because this is the day, they worshiped Baal. This is the day when that particular god has to be worshiped or that particular sun cult has to be observed and we burn a yule log, and we put up trees as a symbol of new life. We do all this on this day. We close our businesses because that is our religious holiday. Oh really! That's interesting. That is a clever little thing to send gifts to one another, that I understand.

So different, interesting, seemingly harmless to anybody's intent, religious practices were practiced all over the place toward the end of Solomon's reign.

When Solomon's son Rehoboam began to rule, he raised taxes, and this caused the rebellion and break up of Israel into the northern ten tribes of Israel and the southern 2 tribes of the house of Judah.

When we come to Jeroboam's reign in the ten northern tribes, we have rank substitution of form. I mean he completely supplanted the whole system, including the Sabbath, the Holy Days, the place of worship, the priesthood, the method, and the burning of incense. Everything was substituted into another form. It isn't exactly that you go into the worship of another god, you take various and sundry methods of worship and times and places and you say that you are still

worshipping the true God, and so all form of the religion was completely changed in the ten northern tribes under the reign of Jeroboam.

It continued this way for 230 years without interruption, without a single revival, at no time did they throw out all these other gods and turn back to the true God and reestablish the worship of God and go back to Jerusalem and worship there in the Temple on the 15th day of the seventh month, instead of the 15th day of the eighth month.

Standards of Conduct

The moral decay, I think, came later and indeed it is attacked by the prophets that come on the scene later. You will hear Amos and Hosea and some of these men talking a great deal about the harlotry and whoredom that has entered into the land in later years. The substitution and form may have led to the loss of absolute standards of conduct and behavior. In other words, if we say to ourselves, I no longer accept this standard of conduct over here. I no longer say, that with the standard of God that I will worship on the Sabbath and I will worship at the feast of Tabernacles, I will do this, and I will do that. This standard is now set aside. What about the standard that says, "Thou shall not lie?" What about the standard that says, "Thou shall not covet?" What about "Thou shall not steal?" You see, what I think happened is that they set aside the worship of God completely, in the form that God gave them. And as a result, over time, the remainder of the standards that they had, rotted away and you will see very clearly as you begin to study the later prophets who preached to the people how clearly, how powerfully, that took place. The implication is, that if you can't get the simple things right, when God says "Here's what I want you to do, on the 15th day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:34-36), I want you to abstain from labor, and I want you to observe a festival and on first 15th day of the first month (Leviticus 23:6-8), I want you to put all of the leavening out of your house." This is not something that requires great moral agonizing, is it? It is not the sort of thing that you have great beads of sweat popping out all over you in the middle of the night, as you fight in your mind with a desire to keep that leavening in your home and you want to get it out. Is it? You may want to argue intellectually, it may be an aggravation, but it is not the sort of thing that you agonize over.

You simply make a decision to do it and you do it! It isn't that you break your back or anything of the sort. Being able to show up at services and abstain from your normal labors on Pentecost Sunday (Leviticus 23:15-22, Acts 2) is no real thing that creates a gigantic problem inside a person, and it is almost as though, if you can't get these simple little things right that God says for you to do, you are headed for trouble.

God will send a Prophet

God starts very early when the people set aside the form of religion. The first thing God did was to send a prophet, who is not even named, to tell Jeroboam that what he had done was wrong and the direction the whole thing was going to go if the prophet was not heeded. As time goes by, there will be another prophet and yet another prophet, and there will be a prophet beyond that prophet, who will carry out the work that God has for these people as God tries to reach out to their minds to make them realize what is it that they have done.

It's No Big Deal

You know, looking at it from a 21st-century perspective, you sit here and think and let's say you're chatting to somebody about your beliefs, and they ask you, as somebody did a while ago to my wife, "Why do you not observe Christmas?"

You sit down and try to explain it to them. You all have probably been through this sort of situation with people, perhaps family, who at one time or another have found out what you believe, and they say "I just don't see the harm in it, all it is, is just for the kids and it's no big deal. The tree is kind of a pretty thing and we decorate the tree and we put a little cotton around the bottom for snow. One man told me "I don't think of a pagan god when I do this. I'm not thinking of Baal or anything of the sort. The green of the tree represents the new life that I have in Jesus and the star on top of the tree is a star that came and stood over the stable where the young child lay and the snow around the bottom of the tree is purity and symbolizes this". He had his own rigamarole ready for all the things that are symbolized on the tree. I said "Yeah, but the problem is, it may mean that you, but does it mean that to God?" I would have to conclude that that is not what it means to God, because they've got around to all the pagan customs and said that's cute, let's adopt that and that's cute let's adopt that. Now in the 21st-century, we say to ourselves "What's the big deal and why is it so important that we move the festival from the 15th day of the seventh month to the 15th day of the eighth month? After all, the Lord established a second Passover, didn't He? (Numbers 9:10-11). What's the big deal?"

Why is it so important? Well, frankly, I think you could have asked precisely the same questions and in the same mood with that same tone of voice, the same attitude then, that you could now, when Jeroboam did it, when he made the original decision. And when some of the people began to worship Baal in harmless little ways, they could ask "What's the harm in it, the kids enjoy it and have fun with a big bonfire. All these things that we do are good things, they are not bad. Nobody's getting hurt."

Okay, then we have to ask the question: Why on earth did God send this hairy man with a habit of wearing leather, to walk up to the king of a nation and say, "There's not going to be dew or rain these years but according to my word."

Three and a Half Year Drought

Have you ever lived anywhere where they went three and a half years without dew or rain? You know it is one thing to live down here in Southwest Texas when you go through a drought for a period of time, in a geographical area the size of from here to the Valley and it doesn't get a drop of rain for a year or maybe even two or who knows for even three. You have some really tough hardship. But how long does it take you from somewhere out west in California or from somewhere up in the Northeast to load up a semi with produce and food and you get that semi all the way down into the valley to feed people that don't have any food to eat. Twenty-four hours? Forty-eight hours? Thirty-six hours? How long would it take?

What do you suppose it took whenever you have a geographical area in size, which would cover all the way from Egypt all the way to Syria and beyond in the north, with no dew no rain for

three- and one-half years? How much food can you pack up and put on the back of a jackass? How much? How much could you load up on a camel, and how many of them would it take strung out in a train, and how long do you think it would take you to cover 200 miles? Perhaps four hours in your big old semi? You can be going down the road talking on your CB radio about smokies and you will get there in a hurry, can't you? How long do you think it is going to take you walking and leading a string of animals? It would be hard to get there. When you go three and a half years, in an area like that without rain, people are dying, people are starving to death. This was no small thing that the Lord decided to do to these people. Now let's back off just a moment and ask yourself, if it wasn't that big a deal, why do we have this man, at this time with this kind of a prophecy to these people?

Let's Study this man Elijah

Well, with all these questions asked, let's go back and study this man Elijah just a little bit and see if any answers will begin to present themselves to us.

1 Kings 17:1 "Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. {2} And the word of the LORD came to him, saying, {3} Get away from here, and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. {4} And it shall be, that you shall drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. {5} So he went and did according to the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. {6} And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. {7} And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. {8} And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, {9} Arise, get you to Zarephath, which belongs to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain you. {10} So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray you, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. {11} And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray you, a morsel of bread in your hand. {12} And she said, As the LORD your God lives, 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 cook it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

She expected nothing else but death once the food was gone. Their neighbors were in the same straits as they were and the people down the road had the same problem. There was no semi-truck that was going to come rolling in from some agriculture area with a lot of produce for them. When the food was gone, it was gone, and they died. That's the way it is in a famine.

Just a Little Meal in the Barrel

1 Kings 17:13 "Elijah said to her, Fear not; go and do as you have said: but make me a little cake first, and bring it to me, and after that make for you and for your son. {14} 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 sends rain upon the earth. {15} And she went and did according to the

saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. {16} And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Elijah."

This was a long speech for Elijah, as his speeches go, as he explains this whole thing to the woman as to what is going to take place. It is a shocking thing. I will never forget the first time I read that. I was reading along and here is a man of God and a poor widow woman who is about to die with her son. There's nothing left and Elijah said go and make this for me first before you feed your own son, but he went on to say, you'll never run out if you do this through this whole famine, the cruse of oil will never fail and the barrel of meal will never fail and they for a long time were able to eat, and every time they kept going back there was just enough. I never had a question that that thing ever filled up, it is just that every time they went back there was still just enough in the bottom of the barrel to just put it all together and with just a little left over and they came back the next day and there was still just enough to take some of it with a little left over. There was never enough there to make it interesting for anyone to steal it, because it was just a little bit, but for some reason every time she pulled the lid off of the barrel and reached down deep inside it to pull out the meal, there was enough there to make the bread for the day and a little more, and the next day there was enough to make the bread and a little more. It is interesting to see this as a part of the general approach and the work that this man did and how the one who took care him was herself taken care of.

1 Kings 17:17 "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. {18} And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with you, O man of God? are you come to me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? {19} And he said to her, Give me your son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abodes, and laid him upon his own bed. {20} And he cried to the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, have you brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? {21} And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come into him again. {22} And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. {23} And Elijah took the child and brought him down out of the chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother: and Elijah said, See, your son lives. {24} And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

Miracles Performed by Elijah

Now is that all of the object there was to all of this? I would have thought she would have known that pretty clearly by the fact that they always had something to eat, when she was ready to starve to death. Is this all there is to it? There are two major miracles that are performed by Elijah in this one chapter, both of which have to do with the giving and the sustaining and restoration of life. This man's ministry as severe as it is, and as dangerous as it seems to be, because he is not a man to be trifled with as you will see as we go along. His ministry is still a message and the way it is presented in his own life and his dealing with people is the sustaining of life and the restoration of life. This man is a man who is dealing with the raising of the dead. This is something that doesn't happen every time you turn around.

Raising the Dead

I remember some person who was very critical of us once upon a time. He said, "Have any of your ministers ever raised anybody from the dead?" I said "No" and he seemed to feel that he somehow proved something to me with that.

How many people do you suppose there have been in the history of man, who have been dead and brought back to life? Get your Bible out and work that one over if you would. It works out to be something in the neighborhood of one in 1000 years. You know one person being raised from the dead in a whole millennium of time is not exactly what you'd call breaking up the graveyards is it? The mere fact that someone hasn't raised the dead is not that unusual. This is really a remarkable occurrence and a very important part of Elijah's ministry and a part of his message because you have to realize that the message of the man, or a minister or a prophet is contained in more than the things that he says.

Elijah Goes to Ahab

Now let's go to 1 Kings 18 "It came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show yourself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. {2} Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria. {3} And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly)". Here was a man who when Jezebel was killing the prophets of God took one hundred of them and hid them by fifty in a cave and fed them with bread and water and he saved their lives from this evil woman Jezebel.

1 Kings 18:5 "Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, to all fountains of water, and to all brooks: perhaps we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we don't lose all of our animals. {6} So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself." The detail of this segment of Elijah's ministry is interesting because there are other large segments of history that are just passed over with great leaps and jumps. In this one we find out what it is that Ahab and Obadiah were doing to try to save the lives of some animals. There is much more detail as you go through this section than there are in other places.

1 Kings 18:7 "As Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Are you my lord Elijah? {8} And he answered him, I am: go, tell your lord, Behold, Elijah is here. {9} And he said, What have I sinned, that you would deliver your servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? {10} As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom, where my lord hath not sent to seek you: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found you not. {11} And now you say, Go, tell your lord, Behold, Elijah is here." "Do you expect me to do that? This man has been after you everywhere up and down the face the Earth." Obadiah knew how God worked and he was concerned that God might snatch Elijah away and Ahab would not find him, and he would be a dead man.

1 Kings 18:12 "And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, that the spirit of the LORD shall carry you where I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he shall slay me: but I your servant fear the LORD from my youth. {13} 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? {14} And now you say, Go, tell your lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. {15} And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today. {16} So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah. {17} And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, Are you he that troubles Israel?"

Blame It On the Prophet

This is really classic in a way. You can become a nation and you can become so rotten and so corrupt that God decides to send a messenger and says "You people have sinned against me. I'm going to punish you for it." Who do they blame? They blame the prophet. They don't say that God is troubling Israel. They are not quite able to own up to the fact that God doesn't approve of what they're doing. They point the finger at the prophet and say, "You are the one that's causing all this trouble."

Jeremiah, who didn't do anything at all, except say what God said that he was supposed to say winds up in the bottom of a septic tank hoping that someone would pull him out. They blamed him, for what he had said, and all he was, was a prophet just telling the truth.

And so here we are with Ahab saying, "Are you the one troubling Israel?"

1 Kings 18:18 "Elijah answered, I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house." Notice how diplomatic he is. He sidestepped around the question. He said, "You have in your father's house."

Don't Break the First Commandment

Elijah continues: "You have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and you have followed Balaam." Notice what the criticism is. It is "You have forsaken the commandments of the LORD." This is a general statement of sin and notice the specific statement "You have followed another god (Balaam)." It was the violation of the First Commandment.

The Prophets of Baal

1 Kings 18:19 "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." One of the most remarkable statements throughout this entire passage is the statement "So Ahab sent." He was looking for this man Elijah up and down the country. He wants to have his head on a silver platter. Now Elijah shows up and Ahab is afraid to lay a finger on him. What does this tell you about this man? Perhaps he had God's intervention. Perhaps God changed the mind of Ahab and wouldn't let him think about touching Elijah. I suspect there is something more elemental than that. I suspect this man Elijah was selected not only to say the

message, but he was selected because he himself in his physical looks and appearance, his posture and everything about him, also conveyed the same message. He was a hairy man, a wooly character apparently, given to wearing leather and judging if his speech is any indication that he was a very blunt and an abrupt person, and I gather that looking him in the eye, you didn't really feel much like trifling with this man.

So, Ahab said "Gather all Israel unto Mount Caramel and all the prophets of the groves of Baal. Let's all go there."

1 Kings 18:21 "And Elijah came to all the people, and said, How long are you going to halt between two opinions?" The ten northern tribes, at this point had not utterly abandoned the worship of the eternal God. They had not gone totally in the worship of Baal. What they had done was to create a syncretism of their religion and what happened in many cases was that they would adopt the customs and practices of Baal. They would take the name Yahweh and plaster it on all of the practices and worship of Baal and claim to be worshiping Yahweh by all of the customs and practices of Baal. There was this swill that they knew that God is there, and He brought their fathers of Israel out of Egypt to the Red Sea and then they would wander on down to one of the groves or to the Temple of Baal, and they would kneel and pray there with their pagan wives. Elijah was saying "If God is God then serve him, if Baal is god then serve him, but let's get off the fence."

The people wouldn't answer Elijah. He said "I'll tell you what, we have all these prophets of Baal here. I only remain a prophet of the Lord."

Calling Fire Down from Heaven

1 Kings 18:23 Elijah said: "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 it: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under it: {24} And you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord." Elijah is saying "I'm going to call upon the God and the God that answers by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

1 Kings 18:25 "Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for you are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under it. {26} 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." The image of this is mind-boggling. These people are dancing around this altar, jumping up and down. I remember seeing this preacher on television and he got excited in the course of his sermon. There was no podium, he just had a microphone in his hand and he began to jump up and down. I think some charismatics who do this type of thing call what they do dancing before the Lord. They may call it dancing but to me it was leaping. They were hopping, jumping up and down and the people had sweat popping out all over them and that calls to mind this type of thing that was going on here as though somehow if they could have just created enough activity here and yelled enough

hallelujahs at the top of their voice and had just danced around there for a while then maybe they could work something up.

Elijah just stood there and looked at them. He just watched.

Elijah Mocked Them

1 Kings 18:27 "And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them." Elijah walked up and began to jab them. Now this was undoubtedly callous and offensive to many people who were standing nearby, because after all these prophets of Baal were good men and they were very sincere in what they were doing. You don't get out there early in the morning and cut up an animal and lay it on their altar and say, "I expect to see fire come down from heaven" and imply that you really do believe that fire can come down from heaven, if you aren't sincere. You don't jump up and down from morning till noon with all the sweat and being faint without meaning what you are doing, and you don't drag out knives and lances and start cutting yourself and having blood gushing all over yourself, unless you are a sincere person. Right? There were people who would say "Don't make fun of those men. They're sincere!"

Elijah walks up and says: "Call him louder. He's a god! Maybe he's asleep." These guys probably got absolutely furious and so they screamed a little louder. They jumped a little higher, and they cut themselves more and they bled more. Elijah said: "Maybe he's gone hunting. Maybe he's gone to the bathroom." In one translation it says to properly interpret what he is doing, you have to get down to that sort of situation. Elijah jabbed them and made fun of them. "Maybe he's busy, maybe he's on a trip. Maybe he will be back later this afternoon, what time does he keep office hours?" The word "mock" means "to deride, to ridicule, to hold up and make fun of and to laugh at." This is what he was doing, but these were sincere people. Do you think it is bad for a minister to make fun of other preachers? Elijah is going to do a lot worse than just make fun of them.

1 Kings 18:28 "They cried louder and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. {29} 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 answer, nor any that regarded. {30} Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me. And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. {31} 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 your name: {32} 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. {33} And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. {34} 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. {35} And the water ran around about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." All this is happening, and it is getting quite late. The sun is in the process of going down on the horizon and it is the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice.

Elijah's Simple Prayer

1 Kings 18:36 "Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. {37} Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that you are the LORD God, and that you have turned their heart back again."

This was a simple and a quiet prayer. The contrast to someone standing by would have been unbelievable. Between people dancing around and praying at the top of their lungs, shouting, screaming, dancing and jumping, bleeding and no answer. And this man prays a thirty second prayer and all of a sudden there is a sharp crackling sound from the sky above them, and a roaring brilliant flame that comes down, and the bullock is consumed, the wood is consumed, the dust is consumed, all of the water is licked out of the trench around it and everything is dry and it is gone, and then, it is quiet!

There probably had never been a time in the whole day until that moment that it was that quiet. The people, when they finally got their voice back said, "The Lord Yahweh He is God, Yahweh is God."

Prophets of Baal are Executed

1 Kings 18:40 "Elijah said to 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." All of them are dead! Now like I said, this wasn't just a matter of making fun of these men. It is one thing to make fun of them, to make them sound a little bit ridiculous, actually all you're doing is just making them sound as ridiculous as they were. It's another thing to take them down to some other location and put them all to the sword and leave their bodies there for the dogs to lick their blood. It is a sobering thing to realize that God just didn't take too kindly to these men, however sincere they may have been about the things that they did, and it behooves us to pause and try to understand what it is about this that is so serious that would have brought God's attention to it. As I said before, it is a violation of the First Commandment.

Breaking the First Commandment

I wonder sometimes, if we really pay much attention to the breaking of the First Commandment. I thought about it a great deal and I gave a sermon titled "The Hidden Idolatry" a few years ago at the feast, because of a growing awareness of the lack of attention of the First Commandment and what it means "To worship the Lord your God and serve him only" or to treat in a trifling fashion the statements He makes about easy things to do.

Do the Simple Things

After all you're going to put out a lot of work to worship on a day. You are going to put a lot of effort to observe Christmas, if you happen to be a Christmas observing person, and you are going to spend a lot of money on Christmas. What is the pain and agony of laying that aside, and keeping the feast of Tabernacles? It is a simple thing. I can understand how a person could with a

divorce and marriage problem and living alone could sweat blood in the middle of the night and struggle with the problems that they have with their attitudes and difficulties in coping with the law of God in some of those areas. But why should we sweat blood over simple things like putting leavening out of our houses. If you can't place God first and do the simple painless things that He says to do, if for no other reason than he says to do them, where are we going to be and where are our standards going to come from, when we face those times in our lives when we have to sweat blood. What are we going to do when things affect our livelihood and putting food on our table for our family and putting shoes on our children's feet? Where is the help going to come from if we cannot stick to our God and do what He commands?

The fundamental reason why Israel went into captivity, was because they forsook the Lord their God and pursued other gods. It all ends with the sins of the flesh, the moral decay and the moral corruption. Individuals and groups of individuals will suffer, and God will chastise, but the real danger comes in the supplanting of the standards of all righteousness from your life. If you take something home from work that doesn't really belong to you, you can turn to your God with tears rolling down your face and ask for forgiveness and you can sneak that tool back into the plant and leave it there and go away like you have been forgiven and you are right with the world.

Don't Lose Your God

When you have lost your God, you've got no place to go and you can't straighten out your life. All the sins that we do can be put away and can be repented of, if we just know where to go back to, but when you don't know who your God is anymore, where are you going to go? Are you going to go to the god of Christmas? Are you going to go to the god of Easter? Are you going to go to another Jesus that doesn't resemble the Jesus of your Bible? Is that where you are going to go?

Elijah Prayed for Rain

Well, let's continue with Elijah's ministry. 1 Kings 18:41 "Elijah said to Ahab, Get you up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. {42} So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, {43} And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. {44} And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there arises a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare your chariot, and get you down, that the rain stops you not. {45} And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. {46} And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

Now, what would you think, if you had never read any of the rest of the history of the Bible? You would think, this is incredible, three- and one-half years of drought, this man comes back and calls fire down from heaven and he says now I am going to give you some rain, now that you have confessed that God is God, now that we have gotten rid the prophets of Baal. You would have thought that this would've ushered in a revival in the northern tribes. You would think that

if they returned back to the worship of God, then they would have destroyed all of the temples of Baal, gotten rid of all of the idols and they would have returned to God in mass. Wouldn't you think that?

Elijah Ran for His Life

1 Kings 19:1 "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. {2} Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. {3} And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. {4} But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die."

It is hard to grasp the sudden turn that we have experienced here. You would have thought this man would have come back in triumph. You would have thought that he would have come back with all kinds of people around him. You would have thought that he spoke the word and that Jezebel would have been dog meat, but it wasn't so, and he knew it wasn't so. He saw the faces of those people. He knew how they had immediately turned but also knowing men's hearts, he knew how short of time that such a thing as that was likely to last. And so, he requested for himself that he might die. He was just tired of it all.

1 Kings 19:4 Elijah said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. {5} And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said to him, Arise and eat. {6} And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink and laid him down again. {7} 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 you. {8} And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights into Horeb the mountain of God. {9} And he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah?" Why are you down here? Horeb is way down in the wilderness.

1 Kings 19:10 "He said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. {11} 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 broke 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: {12} And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. {13} 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. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah?" {14} "He said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. {15} And the LORD said to him, Go, return on your way to the

wilderness of Damascus: and when you come, anoint Hazeal to be king over Syria: {16} And Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel."

Elisha Anointed to be Elijah's Successor

Elijah was told to get Elisha and to prepare him to be his successor.

1 Kings 19:16 "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shall you anoint to be prophet in your room. {17} And it shall come to pass, that him that escapes the sword of Hazeal shall Jehu slay: and him that escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." There was a lot of people in the northern tribes of Israel that were going to die in the months and years to come.

Verse 18: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." Elijah didn't know of these people and to be sure, there were 7000 people among the numbers of the population of northern tribes, who had never at any time had allowed themselves to bow their knees to Baal, had never allowed themselves to kiss a statue of Baal, had never engaged in any way in the practices of the worship of Baal. Seven thousand, God said, I have reserved to Me. This is perhaps a mild rebuke to Elijah, but also must have been encouraging to him because he was profoundly depressed. He really did believe that he was the last man who was trying to be faithful to God. A person might want to keep this in mind, when you yourself resist the pull to worship another god, pat yourself on the back and say I'm going to serve God. Please bear in mind that God in our society today is reserving you as one of those people that has not bowed their knees to Baal nor kissed him.

1 Kings 19:19 "So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yokes of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. {20} And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray you, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you. And he said to him, Go back again: for what have I done to you?" This is a very obscure translation but what he means by this is, it's okay, it's fine, go ahead, you know what I've done to you, now I want you to get your goodbyes said.

1 Kings 19:21 "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."

There are any number of instances that are worth your time to read and study in the verses and sequence that follows throughout these following chapters. There was a war between Benhadad who besieged Samaria, and by the direction of the prophet the Syrians were all wiped out. What is interesting to me about this segment is that Elijah is not the one that is sent to Ahab with the one-piece of good news that he is going to get in all that period of time. Elijah is apparently reserved for one type of information, one type of message, for one type of service, where Ahab is concerned. Another prophet says to Ahab that he is going to win this battle and indeed he wins.

There is a record of the war of the fighting back and forth that went on between Israel and Syria, and how they warred against each other. There are some interesting little sidelights about how

they let the Syrians off, when it was not God's intention to let the Assyrians off and there were terrible things that took place.

Don't Be Overly Wicked

It's also interesting as we read along in First Kings 21 how a person can go on, year after year, with his life being corrupt and wicked and things being wrong and basically God has already made His decision that He is going to cut him off, but God oftentimes does not move in immediately to deal with a man just as soon as he turns astray or as soon as he does something wrong. Sometimes He just writes him off and begins to ignore him, but there is a proverb that says: "Be not over much wicked, neither be you foolish: why should you die before your time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:17). He is saying "Don't be overly wicked." You have decided to go a certain way and God has finally looked at you long enough and says "I'm not going to mess with this man. I don't really feel he's ever going to listen to me", and essentially turns His back on you, and walks away. He is not sitting there with a club ready to beat you over the head over everything you do. He is not trying to curse you, because he feels you are cursed enough.

Ahab Lusts After a Vineyard

There are certain deeds, certain actions, that a person can do that are so obnoxious that God cannot and will not allow Himself to ignore it.

First Kings Chapter 21 records just such an incident. A man named Naboth possessed an apparently beautiful vineyard. He and his family had worked on it for generations. That particular plot of land had been his ever since it had been divided by lot to his tribe when they crossed Jordan. It was an old vineyard and very valuable, but perhaps even more than the value that could be assigned to it in silver or gold was the sentimental value attached to it.

Our man Ahab lusted after this particular vineyard and set his heart on it and he decided that he wanted it and tried to buy it. Naboth said, "God forbid, I can't sell you this vineyard, it has been in my family from day one. I Can't let it go, no I'm sorry. There is no price. There's no question of jacking up the price to a higher level. I'm just not selling." So, Ahab went home and laid on his bed and turned his face to the wall and pouted and wouldn't eat. He was mad. Jezebel, when she finds out what's going on, says "Ah come on, get off your bed and I'll give you the vineyard. She just proceeds to arrange the judicial murder of Naboth, hires lying witnesses, has him set up on high, condemns him of blasphemy and has him stoned to death. She comes back to Ahab and says, "Go get the vineyard, it's yours, Naboth is dead."

As I said, you can be bad, and it can go on, but don't ever assume that you can't make it worse by doing one more evil thing. There is a profound lesson in that. I have met people in my time who have said I have gone so far, what's the difference, I might as well go all the way. Oh no, don't ever assume that. Don't ever make that mistake. You can be going along, and God will leave you alone and everything will percolate for a while but if you take one more step and that's all it takes.

1 Kings 21:17 "The word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, {18} Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to possess it. {19} "You shall speak to him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Have you killed, and also taken possession? And you shall speak to him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your blood. {20} And Ahab said to Elijah, have you found me, O my enemy? And he answered, I have found you."

Ahab had not seen Elijah in a long time. I imagine that when Ahab set eyes on Elijah and saw him walking toward him as he was going down to possess the vineyard, his blood must've run cold in his veins. I bet he turned pale. He stopped in his tracks, because he knew that when this man came, the message from God was not good. And when he heard it, what could he say, "Have you found me O my enemy?"

Elijah answered, "I found you: because you have sold yourself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. {21} Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, {22} And will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith you have provoked me to anger." In other words, God will destroy all of Ahab's family, his posterity and wipe him totally out.

Verse 23 God also spoke of Jezebel saying, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. {24} Him that dies of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dies in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. {25} But there was nobody like Ahab, who sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

I want you to think about this for a moment. At the absolute worst of everything you've ever done, how bad have you been in your life?

It doesn't get much worse than Ahab. God said that there was nobody like Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord.

Ahab Humbled Himself

1 Kings 21:26 "He did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. {27} And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." Here's a man who's accustomed to slamming doors and kicking things out of his way. Here's a man who's accustomed to speaking firmly and loudly and giving orders and having people obey and I would imagine there were servants around the palace, who were startled to turn around and see Ahab quietly opening and closing doors and him saying quietly, "Would you mind taking care of this." He was totally different.

1 Kings 21:28 "And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, {29} Do you see how Ahab humbles himself before me? because he humbles himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

This little passage right here at the end of chapter 21 is one of the most profound in the entirety of your Bible, for it comes to the most wicked man in this entire line of wicked men, rotten to the core and even he when he finally got it into his head what God said, humbled himself, clothed himself in sackcloth and cast ashes on himself and walked very humbly around the palace being very sorry and very repentant for what he had done. God said, "Look at that, look at what that man has done." It is so rare to see that. God said, "I cannot bring it in his days." Now what about his son? Suppose his son had heard and knew of the same message that Elijah had prophesied, and his son clothed himself in sackcloth and acted humbly. What do you think would've happened? God would've said "Well look at that. I will not bring evil in his day, but in the days of his son I will bring it." What about his son? If he heard it and repented and humbled himself then God would've said "Well look at that. I will not bring evil in his days either."

Do you begin to understand that when God says there will be evil to a family to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, that what he's talking about is that once a curse is pronounced, it hangs there, but you could walk out from under it? You can humble yourself before God and you can repent of what you have done and walk right out from under it, but it will hang there, but you see, it needs never to fall, because there'll come a point in the second generation, third generation or the fourth generation, where it will no longer exist.

How bad can you get and walk out from under it? I'd be reluctant to say that I'm a better man than Ahab, but I don't think that I'm any worse. I am reasonably sure that when I am worse in my life that I'm no better than this man that God said, "There was nobody like him who did sell himself to work wickedness", and I think if he could walk out from under it, I can walk out from under it. I think that this is a very encouraging piece of information to know. It doesn't make any difference how bad you've been, if you go one step further, you could get into deep trouble, but even then, you could walk out from under it, if you will repent and humble yourself and turn around and go in the right direction.

We have now come to a man named Elisha and the Ministry that he is going to perform, but that will have to wait till the next article in this series.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite trait, miracle and/or story about Elijah?
2. What are your thoughts about the sins of Jeroboam?
3. What are your thoughts about the continuing decline of Israel and their kings?

4. What can we, as Christians, learn from the fall of Israel?
5. Does the fact that the majority of Christians deny the validity of God's Holy Days have a negative impact on Christianity today?
6. What are your thoughts about the Mt. Carmel incident?
7. Why do you think Israel did not go through a spiritual revival after Mt. Carmel?
8. How do you make sure that you are keeping the first Commandment?
9. What are your thoughts about Elijah fleeing from Jezebel?
10. Do you see how the story of Ahab is not only a lesson in refraining from sin but also an example of God's grace and mercy?