

ELIJAH

THE TISHBITE



**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF
ELIJAH the PROPHET**

(1 KINGS 16:29 - 2 KINGS 2:18)

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CHRONOLOGY

Assyria

ASHURNAZIPAL

SHALMANEZER III

ADADNIRARI

Syria

BENHADAD I

BENHADAD

HAZAEI

Kings of

Israel

ELAH
ZIMRI

OMRI

ATHAZIAH

AHAB

JEHORAM

JEHU

JEHOAHAZ

BAASHA

Prophets

of Yahweh

ODED
AZARIAH

JEHU

MICAH

YAHAZIEL
ELIEZER

ELISHA

ZECHARIAH

ELIJAH

School of the Prophets

JONAH

Kings of

Judah

JEHOSHAPHAT

ATHAZIAH

JEHOASH or JOASH

ASA

JEHORAM

ATHALIAH

Years B.C.

900

890

880

870

860

850

840

830

820

810

800

FOREWORD

"It is with the suddenness of a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder out of the eastern sky, that Elijah the prophet bursts upon us in the narrative of the Old Testament."

This is the way that one writer describes the dramatic entrance of Elijah into the darkest chapter of Israel's history. Truly Israel's heavens were black with the dark deeds emanating from the throne. Sixty years had passed since the Kingdom had divided after the death of Solomon. While the Southern Kingdom had remained relatively stable with the monarchy firmly entrenched in a succession of kings of David's line, the fruits of apostasy in the Northern Kingdom were ripening for judgment.

Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the man "that made Israel to sin", had laid the foundation for the misery and bloodshed that was to follow. In those sixty short years the dynasty in the North had passed into the hands of four families. The transition each time was accomplished by treachery, intrigue and murder. As each king succeeded to the throne, they rivalled each other in wickedness so that it was said of three of them at that stage of history ... "he did evil in the sight of Yahweh above all that were before him". Jeroboam held this infamous distinction (1 Kings 14:9), to lose it to Omri (16:25), and finally this crown of iniquity settled upon his son, Ahab (16:30).

In these days of unparalleled apostasy Yahweh brought Elijah upon the scene. From the bleak escarpment of Gilead, swept with the refreshing winds that whistled down from the snow-clad Lebanese ranges, the prophet came into the nation even as he was taken out; in a whirlwind of divine activity. God's prophet came with a message of condemnation to that Royal House, which Yahweh had totally rejected. That rejection was stamped all over Elijah, not only in his spiritual qualities, but also in his very physical appearance.

Ahab had embellished the sins of his predecessors with the gaudy and ostentatious worship of the Zidonians. He imported this new form of licentious apostasy into the nation when he married "that woman Jezebel", Queen of all Harlots, whose outward adorning was according to the high principle of vanity, and etched with human hands. Such was the horrendous iniquity of this painted lady that it proved beyond the digestive system of that loathsome scavenger - the dog (2 Kings 9:35). In deference to this Royal Majesty of Sin, Ahab had beautified the city of Jezreel, and fortified his Capital, Samaria, where also his "Ivory House" (1 Kings 22:39) gave witness to the splendour of his reign. Thus it was that Israel sparkled with Ahab's building achievements, developed upon the foundation of his father Omri's iron rule.

Everywhere they appeared, the prophets of Baal (along with the 400 consorts of Jezebel, known as "The prophets of the groves",) sent Israel giddy with their

gorgeous attire and frenzied gymnastics performed in the name of religion. The "everlasting hills", saturated with divine history, and now soaked in the blood of the true prophets, echoed with the sound of the vain repetition of the heathen .. "O Baal hear us". The school of the prophets, founded by Samuel (and nurtured by a succession of faithful right up till now) was overshadowed by another school presided over by that imperious headmistress Jezebel. She being educated in the best of the world's colleges and, skilled in their practice, diligently set out "to teach and to seduce My servants to commit fornication and to eat those things sacrificed unto idols" (Rev.2:20).

Into this dazzling world, created by the marriage of the gods of the world with those of Israel's own imaginations, came a specimen of Yahweh's creation. How marvellous it was in their eyes. Carved out of the regions of Gilead, crowned with nought but a great shaggy mane of hair - earning him the title of "Lord of Hair" - (2 Kings 1:8 Heb.) and clothed with but a girdle of leather; he stood as a monument of difference to the sophisticated world to which he came. Standing in the court of Ahab, doubtless in the presence of Ahab's courtiers, Elijah announced the cessation of Heaven's liquid blessing. In his personal bearing he wore an inscription as to the reasons why ... "Behold they which are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately are in kings palaces" (Luke 7:25), while others "wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, of whom the world (especially this one) was not worthy" (Heb. 11:37-38).

Elijah left the earth scorched with the fire of divine judgment. Through the pages of divine history equally vivid impressions have been made upon the minds of readers of all ages. Yet whatever impressions we take, it is obvious that Yahweh chose a man with such a terrifying and awe-inspiring appearance for some good reason. We suggest that the motive behind the choice was to imprint the principle of separateness for all succeeding generations. In all circumstances Elijah was an example and a standing condemnation to his contemporaries. If Ahab dwelt in an ivory palace, Elijah was found in the deserts. If Ahab lived delicately, Elijah accepted his food humbly from the ravens. If Ahab and his cohorts were "gorgeously apparelled" then Elijah accepted his skin of the animal as Heaven's unpretentious fashion. Baal's prophets with their spectacular display of leaping and shouting and cutting upon Mt. Carmel were a hideous contrast to the rough man with head between knees in humility, uttering words from heart, ever so simple, genuine and direct. While Ahab "halted between two opinions", the life of Elijah spoke, even more eloquently than the meaning of his name, "MY GOD IS YAHWEH".

What then of the lesson of his life? Elijah seemed to have been among the private meditations of one greater than he. The Lord of life was once accosted by a man obviously overcome with the disease of materialism ... "Master speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Laying aside any claim to be "divider" of this present world, the Lord of the new age launched into a discourse concerning the simplicities of life. Punctuated throughout his discourse were interesting comments like, "let your loins be girded about" (v.35), "Consider the ravens" (v.24), "I am come to send fire upon the earth" (v.49), "when ye see a cloud rise up out of the west" (v.54). Habitual readers of the Bible will hear those words echoing out of Gilead!

The essence of the Lord's discourse is contained in the words that form the preface:

"for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (v.15).

Taking an inventory of Elijah's earthly possessions is not a time-consuming affair: one garment of hair, one leather girdle! Even when we begin to absorb the fearful lesson and to learn to "seek ye the Kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you" (v.31), we will still, no doubt, hope that among "all these things" there will be a little more in our inventory than in Elijah's!

"There was a man sent from God and his name was John" (John 1:6). To this introduction of the man, Luke adds this testimony that he came "in the spirit and power of Elijah:" (Luke 1:17). In our notes we shall elucidate further on that "spirit", but sufficient for our purpose now to relate his life of separateness and simplicity to that of his predecessor and prototype. Though born of Godly parents (and they of the special class in Israel, chosen of God as priests), yet John did not settle down in their society but "was in the deserts until the day of his shewing unto Israel" (Luke 1:80). "*Shewing*" indeed; the Greek word means "an exhibition!" The Prophet has identified John as "A voice" and many listened with more than curiosity, but how many discerned with their eyes the lesson of God's exhibition in the desert? In this respect, the Lord's question is terribly pertinent ... "and what went ye out for to see?" (Luke 7:24). Matthew describes the exhibition: "And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey" (Matt.3:4). Have we seen him before?

John didn't come from Gilead, but the world to which he came was the same as Elijah's. It was "an adulterous generation." Judea was garnished with Temple, Fortress and Palace, be they Roman, Idumean or Jewish. Men went about with garments edged with phylacteries that got broader, the greater their opinion of themselves. Iniquity abounded and the love of many waxed cold. They halted between more than two opinions, and the only prevailing sentiment that finally united them all was the choice of a robber above the Son of the Creator.

Religious men built bigger barns to store the profit from the sale of widow's houses. Long prayers, stretched out by the artful use of repetition and charged with hypocrisy, were the echoes of Baal's prophets from the top of Carmel, and the means by which these grateful men thanked God that they were not like others, especially Elijah and John.

Elijah's life was altogether different from his contemporaries, therefore his words fell on deaf ears. Could it be any different in the days of John who came in his "spirit and power?"

"But I tell you of a truth many widows were in the days of Elijah ... but unto none of them was the prophet sent" (Luke 4:25-26).

So these were the days of Great Men, "Dividers" of this world, who between them controlled men, territory, and destiny. Luke gives us an impressive list of these

'Greats'. He does so with deliberate intent, for appended to his list there is a lesson far, far greater than them all; indeed a lesson for all others whose aspirations are higher than earthly dominions and titles. Here is his list of men, their status, their dominions (Luke 3:1-2).

"Now in the 15th year of the reign of *TIBERIUS CAESAR*,
PONTIUS PILATE being Governor of Judea, and
HEROD being Tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother
PHILIP Tetrarch of Iturea, and of the region of Trachonitis,
LYSANIUS the Tetrarch of Abilene,
ANNAS & CAIAPHAS being the High Priests ...
 ... the *WORD OF GOD* came".

To whom?

"*JOHN* the son of Zacharias" (What, no title?)

Ruler of what territory?

"In the wilderness!!"

To hear this word there "went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and the region round about Jordan" (Matt.3:5). From the heights of the central mountains they went down to nature's amphitheatre, the wilderness of Judea, to see Yahweh's exhibition, and to listen to one who claimed to be nothing more than a "voice". But what a voice, for "the *WORD OF GOD* came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness". As was to be expected the message delivered was matched by his own performance. Listen to his message to the general populace (Luke 3:10-11).

The question of the people ... "What shall we do then?"

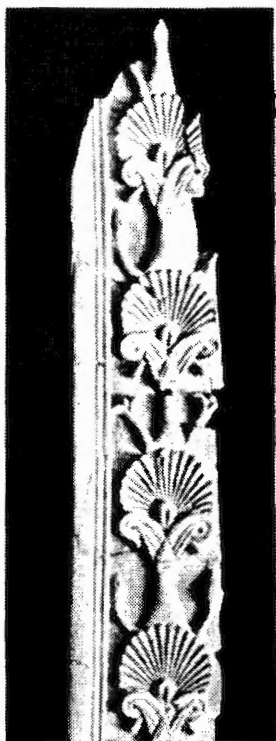
The answer - note - concerns two matters, clothing and food, the basics of life, and the only two matters that are mentioned in relation to John's well-being during his pilgrimage.

1. Clothing - "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none".
Comment: John only had one coat and who would wear it even if it was offered?
2. Food - "and he that hath meat, let him do likewise".
Comment: John would gladly share his larder with any who had the constitution to take it!

An exhortation backed up by that sort of personal example is devastating. Multitudes submitted to the power of his example. Others, stung to the quick, would make their way from that burning wilderness, muttering curses. Whatever they may have called him under their breath, one epithet that even they would have found hard to brand him with was that of 'hypocrite'. Truly this was "the spirit and power of Elijah".

We live in the twentieth century and God would hardly expect us to live as did these two shining examples of spirituality. Their example was to the extreme, because the age demanded it. Yahweh provided these two gaunt harbingers of the coming of the Royal Majesty, so as to shock the nation from their spiritual lethargy, and to convince them of the need for complete reassessment of their values. As for us we are "in the world but not of it". There is no need to live in the caves of the earth in order to remain aloof and isolated from it. Dressed soberly we do stand out from our contemporaries, and even when mingled with others similarly attired, if we are also "clothed with humility", we shall adequately fulfil in our lives "the spirit and power of Elijah". It is all a question of values; the fact that we have cumbered ourselves about with material possessions only makes it harder to ignore them as we try to "look ... at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor.4:18). Elijah and John did not have that problem. Their lives were not as comfortable as ours, but then their minds were not as *uncomfortable* as ours either.

It was deemed worthy that we ponder this lesson of the prophet's life before we plunge into the details of our study. If we have been overawed somewhat by his stern, austere appearance as though he may belong to another world, let us truly appreciate that "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are ..." (James 5:17). Such a one deserves our close attention, who for the best part of his life ruled those passions, to subordinate them to a greater purpose announced to Ahab in these words ... "Yahweh Elohim of Israel liveth, before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1).



"... and the ivory house which he made . . . "
(1 Kings 22:39).

Beside the ruins of a palace of the time of King Ahab excavators at Samaria made a surprising discovery. They came upon fragments of exquisite ivory carving, such as had been inlaid in furniture or used for interior decoration generally. Some of these pieces, like this attractive beading with palm-motif (left), undoubtedly come from the period of the Omri dynasty. Experts believe that they are evidence of Ahab's "ivory house" which the Bible expressly refers to.

CHAPTER 1 - BACKGROUND 1 KINGS 16:29-34

With the Foreword in mind we now begin our consideration of the life of Elijah, with the aid of verse by verse comment.

Elijah is singled out for comment by the Lord Jesus, Paul the Apostle and James "The brother of the Lord". The history of his times forms the background for at least two specific periods of the history reviewed in the Book of Revelation. A close attention to his colourful life and times will, therefore, enrich our understanding of these and other Scriptures.

Our consideration begins with the accession of Ahab to the throne of Israel.

THE STATUTES OF OMRI AND THE WORKS OF THE HOUSE OF AHAB (Micah 6:16)

29 ¶ And in the thirty and eighth year of A'-sā king of Jū-dāh began A'-hāb the son of Om'-ri to reign over Is'-rā-ēl: and A'-hāb the son of Om'-ri reigned over Is'-rā-ēl in Sā-mār'-i-ā twenty and two years.

30 And A'hāb the son of Om'ri did evil in the sight of the LORD ^cabove all that were before him.

31 And it came to pass, as if it had been ^da light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jēr-ō-bō'-ām the son of Nē'-bāt, that ^ehe took to wife ^fJēz'-ē-bēl the daughter of Eth-bā'-āl king of the ^gZi-dō'-ni-āns, and went and served ^hBā'-āl, and worshipped him.

v.29. "began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel" - The name "Ahab" in the Hebrew means "father's brother" or "friend" and truly Ahab did follow in the footsteps of his father Omri. Omri's name means "to heap up" and Omri, being an industrious but wicked king, did succeed in "heaping up", not only the economic prosperity of Israel but also the apostasy which began in the reign of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. However, in the days of Ahab, who followed truly in the footsteps of his father, that which Omri had begun to "heap up" Ahab completed, and we have upon the throne at the time of the introduction

of Elijah, the very worst of the kings in Israel. In these two verses, 29 and 30, it is thrice repeated that Ahab was "the son of Omri" and therefore, emphasises that Omri had commenced a new dynasty in Israel after the traitor Zimri committed suicide in the besieged city of Tirzah (16:18). Omri's dynasty lasted for four generations and, until the succession of Ahab, he had been the most wicked king in Israel (16:25).

v.31. "he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians" - Jezebel's name means "chaste" but she was anything but this! Her immoral character stands as a type of those who would teach false doctrine to seduce God's servants away from the Truth (Rev.2:20). There is no doubt whatever that this comment of the Lord is based upon the historical verity concerning this woman and her influence in Israel. She had become in Israel the high priestess of all that was immoral. Thus while Elijah and Elisha had encouraged the School of the Prophets, where the word of Yahweh was taught and understood, this woman had established in Israel the colleges of immorality whereby Israel were to learn the abominable doctrine of fornication, being associated with her peculiar form of idolatry. No

wonder that this religion caught fire in Israel and affected so many of them; such teaching was appealing to one of the strongest instincts of human nature.

Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the man "who made Israel to sin", had certainly laid the foundation for this awful apostasy. We read of the way in which he broke away from the Truth in 1 Kings 12:25-33. In that record note the way in which Jeroboam so carefully weaned Israel away from the influence of the Truth which at that time was centred in Rehoboam's kingdom in the south, and headed up by the priesthood in Jerusalem. Knowing that the influence of the southern religion could cause his people to again unite with Jerusalem and thereby rend the kingdom away from him, Jeroboam made careful preparation that he might sufficiently impress the people and keep them in the north. In this way he hoped to keep them separate from their brethren of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. For this purpose he made two calves, one of which he put in Bethel and the other in Dan. Bethel means "the house of God" and Dan means "judgment" and truly judgment would begin at the house of God, for, in the very first instance, the apostasy which Jeroboam introduced certainly started that way. It is significant that the people went to worship before the calf that was in Dan. (v.30) Their worship would indeed bring "judgment" upon their heads! Then Jeroboam set about reconstituting the religion of Israel in order that he may impress the people to stay with him as their appointed leader. "He made an house of the high places and made priests of the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi". (v.31) The term "the lowest of the people" does not necessarily mean that they were immoral, though, of course, this was the general condition of the nation. The words in the Hebrew indicate that the priests were just common people, "anyone", as it is expressed in 2 Chron.13:9-10. What Jeroboam did was "to give everyone a go." This was the exact converse to the way in which God had appointed the Levites to become the spiritual leaders of the nation. For this reason He ordered the people to pay tithes so that they might keep the Levites free from the mundane things of this life to give themselves unstintingly to the study of the Word and to the dissemination of the Truth among the nation (Num.8 and 18). In this way God ensured that a priesthood and the tribe of Levi were set apart for the prime purpose of keeping His Word uppermost in the mind of the nation; as Malachi says, "the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth" (Mal.2:7). The system which Jeroboam implemented was certainly not designed to give the Word of God prime place in the minds of the people. The common people, engaged necessarily in the mundane affairs of life, were hardly in a position to give themselves with an undivided mind to the study of the Word of God and as a consequence of their poor ministrations must have lowered the people's estimation of that lofty Law which God gave to Moses.

Having therefore, laid the foundation whereby the people may lose their contact with the power of the Word administered by the Levites, Jeroboam set about preventing even social intercourse with the people of the south. He ordained a feast on the 15th day of the 8th month which was designed to take the place of the Feast of Tabernacles that was held on the 15th day of the 7th month. (1 Kings 12:32)

This Feast of Tabernacles, the details of which are recorded in Lev.23:33-44, was a joyous occasion in Israel, when the nation gathered together to dwell in booths and to partake of all the fruits of the land which, by the time of the feast, had been fully gathered in. Thus this feast was designed to create a spirit of fraternal association and of rejoicing in the goodness of Yahweh, for the bountiful season had provided them in abundance so as to make their lives full and happy. Such a feast was very popular and Jeroboam realised the dangers to him if his people gathered together under those circumstances with the people of Judah.

Finally, he himself entered into the worship and officiated upon the altar which he had made at Bethel. This was a personal intrusion by Jeroboam into the appointments of Yahweh, he not coming from the tribe of Levi nor of course belonging to the family of the priesthood. This was a clear departure from the foundation principles of the Law of Moses and verse 33 significantly records that he did that which "he had *devised of his own heart*".

From this point on the decline of Israel was inevitable. In the next sixty years until the time of Ahab and Elijah, the nation rapidly deteriorated. Wickedness grew in magnitude until the days of Ahab, when it was considered it "had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat!" (1 Kings 16:31) Adding iniquity to iniquity he took into Israel that cursed woman Jezebel, thus importing into the nation a foreign religion, which neither they nor their fathers had known, a religion heavily spiced with all that is sensual and devilish, appealing to the baser instincts of mankind and calculated to bring the effect of the Truth to a halt were it not for the intervention of Yahweh.

As we develop the background scene, it is as well to understand the nature of the character of Jezebel so that we may come to appreciate the devastating effect that this woman had, not only upon Ahab, but upon the nation as a whole. Jezebel was not only immoral, but she was also a very determined and ruthless person.

For all his wickedness Ahab did have a better side to his character and were it not for her influence, things may have been different in his household and, as a consequence, with the nation at large. As a testimony to her influence over Ahab we read in 1 Kings 21:25, "but there was none like unto Ahab which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Yahweh, whom *Jezebel his wife stirred up*". In the margin note that the alternative rendering of "stirred up" is, "incited". She was a provocative woman with one determined intent, namely, to entirely eradicate the Truth out of Israel and to replace it with her own abominable religion.

Ahab *did* have something to *sell*; there *was* a better side to his character, which, if he willed it and placed his confidence and trust in his God, he could have developed to overcome the weakness of his flesh, and so exercise responsible rule in Israel. But it was not so to be. In the historical record of their lives we have two incidents which clearly illustrate the terrible influence which Jezebel wielded over this uncertain king. The first of these occurred after the slaughter of the prophets of Baal, after they had failed to bring down fire from heaven in the contest upon Mount Carmel. Following the dash down the Valley of Jezreel in his chariot with Elijah pointing the way, Ahab drove into Jezreel, the city of Jezebel, there to confront his

wife. We note the significant report that he gave her concerning the events upon Mount Carmel. It is recorded in 1 Kings 19:1 "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and withall how he had slain all the prophets with the sword". "The prophets" in question were "the prophets of Baal" but Ahab did not call them such before Jezebel. Had he called them "the prophets of Baal" the expression could imply a doubt as to whether he considered them as true prophets, and therefore, whether he disagreed with their slaughter. However, as he represented them to Jezebel as "the prophets" it is obvious that before her he identified himself with them, because he knew what her feelings were on the matter.

The second incident which again illustrates the way in which this man would change before the queen is found in *1 Kings 21* which deals with the matter of the vineyard of Naboth that Ahab procured by the murder of that righteous man. When the original request was made by Ahab to buy the vineyard, note the basis upon which Naboth refused that request: "Yahweh forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee" (v3). Upon this the king went away to sulk like a disobedient and naughty child, the record clearly indicating what was in his mind (v4). He was heavily disgruntled, but acknowledged, and the verse repeats it, the religious reason why Naboth could not sell the vineyard. However, when confronted by Jezebel his wife who came upon the scene to enquire as to his misery, the king does not represent Naboth's religious reason for the refusal to sell his vineyard, but, at the end of verse 6 merely states that Naboth had said, "I will not give thee my vineyard". This was a misrepresentation of Naboth's point of refusal. Before Jezebel, the king again removes the religious reason for the failure of the transaction in his endeavour to buy the vineyard so as to hide from his wife his conscience in regard to Naboth's religion.

With such a ruthless and immoral woman as the power behind the throne, is it any wonder that Jeroboam's beginnings had now blossomed out in the fulness of apostasy and produced these times into which Elijah was to be introduced to reverse the trends in the nation.

Before we pass on from the review of Jezebel's character, it is as well to note another comment of the Lord Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation. Speaking of the destruction of the Roman whore the Lord says, "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all that was slain upon the earth" (18:24). The historical narrative recorded in 1 Kings 18:4 is the *first* Biblical record of the persecution of the prophets of Yahweh by the civil power and it was headed up by Jezebel. Again we see the monumental influence of this woman in Israel. The Lord Jesus Christ saw her not only as a personification of false doctrines seducing the servants of God from the Truth (2:20), but also as the prototype of that greatest of all the apostasies, the Roman whore, the mother of harlots which system is to be obliterated at his coming.

Thus the great wickedness of Jezebel had stamped itself upon the nation and upon history: and the nation of Israel was now ripe for the judgments of God.



The contest with the prophets of Baal on Carmel challenged them on their own ground: Baal as a weather-god is depicted here holding axe and thunderbolt; 8th century BC, from Syria.

v.31. *“and served Baal”* - Baal worship was introduced earlier in Israel’s history (see Judg.2:13). It quickly spread until it was overthrown in the days of Samuel (1 Sam.7:4; 12:10). Yet now, after 200 years, it is reintroduced into Israel by Ahab and continued until the end of the history of the ten tribes (2 Kings 17:6). Baal was the god of the sun and of fertility and as such was associated with Ashera, the female deity of the Phoenicians and Zidonians; the two of them together were considered the god and goddess of fertility. One can imagine the immoral and profane rites associated with the worship of this pair in Israel. “Baal” means “lord” or more particularly “possessor or husband”. It is true that “Baal-worship” has ever been popular for, as the Apostle says, “of whom a man is overcome of the same is he brought into bondage” (2 Pet.2:19). Whoever or whatever, then, possesses a person’s mind or body becomes his baal, his possessor, and such a person overcome by anything extraneous to the Word of God is one who leaves no room for the influence of Yahweh in his life and consequently is truly brought into bondage to his possessor.

32 And he reared up an altar for Bā’āl in the ⁱhouse of Bā’āl, which he had built in Sā-mār’i-ā.

33 And Ā’-hāb made a ^{2k}grove; and Ā’-hāb did more to provoke the LORD God of Īś’rā-ēl to anger than all the kings of Īś’rā-ēl that were before him.

34 ¶ In his days did Hī’-ēl the Bēth’-ēl-ite build ^mJēr’-i-chō; he laid the foundation thereof in Ā-bī’-rām his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Sē’-gūb, ^oaccording to the word of the LORD, which he spake by ^pJōsh’-ū-ā the son of Nūn.

v.32. *“the house of Baal”* - The judgments of God finally fell upon the house of

Ahab by the hand of Jehu. This fierce wielder of the sword of judgment called all the worshippers of Baal into this house under the pretence of worship and, once having got them in there, he destroyed them all and the house into which they had been gathered (2 Kings 10:21). Subsequent to this he had that same house partially reconstructed into a public toilet! (2 Kings 10:27, RSV has "latrine"). Jehu was the scourge of Yahweh appointed to the destruction of Ahab's house. As a result of its association with Baal worship there was a monument left upon the earth which spoke so eloquently of Yahweh's abhorrence of such a foul religion.

v.33. *"and Ahab made a grove"* - For "grove" the Hebrew is "asherah", referring to the Phoenecian goddess of love. It was evidently an idolatrous object (2 Kings 21:7; 23:6) and apparently was made of wood (Judg.6:25-30). In this latter place the Hebrew word means "to be erect" and evidently the idolatrous object was made of the stem of a tree, and connected with most immoral rites. Here was the female consort of the god Baal, who together, were to introduce into the nation immoral rites of fertility and to lay a symbolic foundation for the teaching of Jezebel who taught prostitution as one of the first principles of her foul religion (cp.1 Kings 18:19; Rev.2:20).

v.34. *"In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho"* - Jericho was an accursed city which Yahweh had devoted to utter destruction as an indication of his abhorrence of the worship of the Canaanites (see Josh.6:26). Yahweh threatened any who would attempt to build the city with the loss of some of his children. The city was partially restored in the days of the Judges (Judges 6:3-13 and 2 Sam.10:5) but now it undergoes a major reconstruction under the patronage of Ahab, king of Israel. The man Hiel who undertook to reconstruct the city must have had lofty aspirations for his name means "the living God", while that of his firstborn son, Abiram, means "a lofty father" ("Abram" was but a contraction of "Abiram"). His second son Segub also means "lofty" or a "height". Thus we see that Hiel was a man with lofty aspirations yet who was brought low because of the curse of Yahweh which, hundreds of years before, He had placed upon this city. How significant therefore, that this Gentile city of the curse should again rear its head above the soil of Eretz Israel under the patronage of a man who introduced into the nation an entirely Gentile worship which was to level Israel to the ground and to bring great ruin to the people of God.

CHAPTER 2 - 1 KINGS 17:1 POWER TO SHUT HEAVEN

We are immediately introduced to Elijah who abruptly appears upon the scene to confront the apostate Ahab sitting upon his royal throne. Elijah's name means, "My God is Yahweh" and in every respect Elijah stood as a stark contrast and a challenge to this godless and materialistic age which he had come now to denounce. (See Foreword).

v1. "*the Tishbite*" - It is difficult to determine the meaning of the Hebrew word here. Some suggest it could be related to the village of "Thisbe". Others consider it to be derived from a root meaning "an inhabitant" from a Hebrew word "toshab" which is rendered elsewhere as "stranger" and "sojourner" (Gen.23:4; Lev.25:4; Psa.39:12). Certainly Elijah was "a stranger" in his environment!

"of the inhabitants of Gilead" - "Gilead" means "the hill of witness" from the Hebrew word "gal", "something rolled", that is "a heap of stones" and "ed" meaning "witness". This locality was given its name by Jacob when he finally separated himself from the influence of Laban's house to make his way back to the Land of Promise from whence he originated (see Gen.31:47 and note the margin). The name was to Jacob a constant reminder of his separation from all that was contrary to the covenants of God, which had promised to him and his descendants the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. Gilead was a term later used to describe the whole region east of Jordan, lying between the river Yarmuk in the north, which spilt into the river Jordan just below the Sea of Galilee, to the river Arnon in the south which emptied its waters into the Dead Sea.

CHAPTER 17

AND ¹E-lí'-jäh the Tish'-bite, ²who was of the inhabitants of ³Gil'-è-äd, said unto Ä'-háb, ⁴As the LORD God of Ís'-râ-ël liveth, ⁵before whom I stand, there shall not be ⁶dew nor ⁷rain these years, but according to my word.

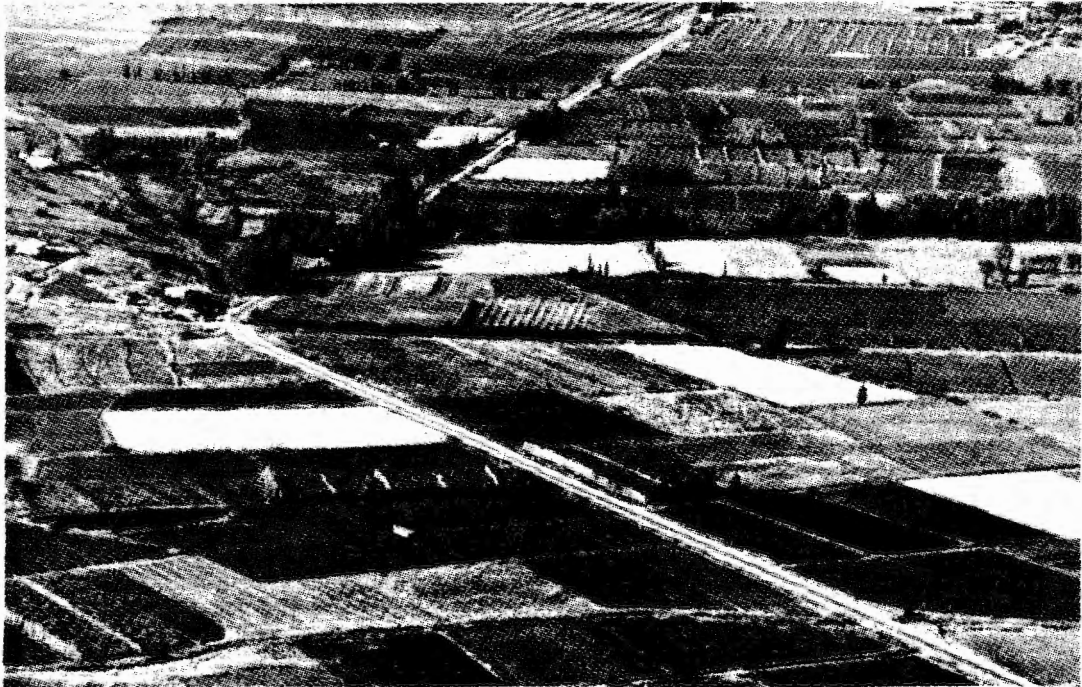
A little consideration of the region of Gilead will help us in our appreciation of the character of Elijah who emanated from that district.

Gilead was a mountainous district with the mountains running in a horizontal line north and south at an elevation of about 2,000 ft. above sea level; but, because the Jordan depression plunges down the Gilead escarpment a further one thousand feet below sea level to the floor of the valley below, the escarpment stood three thousand feet above the Jordan depression. From the heights of the Judean hills looking across the great gulf of the Jordan valley one sees the line of the Gilead hills, deep purple in shade, running parallel on the other side. Further east Gilead gives way to a wide table-land which runs off on to the Arabian plateau. The land between the escarpment and the plateau is tossed about in a wild confusion of undulating downs. Some of the finest views of the land of Israel can be had from the region of Gilead and some have described the view north of Jabbok as one of the finest in the world, taking in as it does part of the Lebanon range, Galilee, all the Valley of Jezreel, the Carmel Range running south of Jezreel and then, further south, the ranges of Ephraim and Judah. The whole region is split by streams running through the

plateau and rushing down to the Jordan over the escarpment of Gilead and because part of this district was allocated to the tribe of Reuben, these streams are described in Judges 5:15-16 as the "streams of Reuben" (AV "divisions of Reuben"). To the north the land is covered in rich volcanic soil and is noted wheat country. It is here also that the oaks of Bashan grew to immense height and size (Isa.2:13; Zech. 11:2). In the days of the prophets, roaming herds of the bulls of Bashan and flocks of goats and sheep were renowned in this area (Deut.32:14; Psa.22:12; Amos 4:1; Ez.39:18; Mic.7:14). In days gone by forests cloaked the middle section of Gilead and the region was noted for the orchards of fruit that grew in the valleys. Against the purple background of the mountain face, and the lush green of the prolific forests in this area, flocks of wild goats glistening white were seen to plummet down the hillsides, the figure being taken up in the Song of Solomon for some of the eloquent, symbolic pictures of the bride of Christ (Song 4:1; 6:5). Gilead was equated with Lebanon in fertility and beauty (Jer.22:6). To the south the jungles of bush were interspersed with large open spaces and this region was a land of shepherds (2 Kings 3:4). Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh were occupied in cattle-raising and naturally they desired this wide, undulating plateau of Gilead as their inheritance before the rest of the tribes settled in the land of Canaan itself (Num. 32:1, 4, 16).

Isolated by the great Jordan depression, cut off from the Arabian plateau by the deserts which rolled off to the east and dissected as it was by "the streams of Reuben" plunging down the escarpment of the Jordan valley, Gilead became the land of exile and refuge for those fleeing from their oppressors. David fled here from Absalom (2 Sam.17:24). Jacob found refuge at Mahanaim (Gen.32:2, 7, 10). And

Plain of Esdraelon



in later times when the Roman hordes encompassed the city of Jerusalem, in accordance with the warning of their Master, the true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ fled to the town of Pella, situated in the northern regions of Gilead. Men born and reared in Gilead were men of hardiness who knew the tough and isolated life of the shepherds and of those who tended the large roaming herds of cattle. Swept by the refreshing, biting winds which came down the snow-clad mountains of Lebanon, open to the sky with the Arabian plateau rolling off to the east and subject to the winds and the dust which blew from the deserts, Gilead was a region which bred resilient inhabitants. A description of such people is given in 1 Chronicles, chapter 12, where we read of "the Gadites that separated themselves unto David into the hold of the wilderness, men of might, men of war, fit for the battle, that could handle the shield and the buckler whose faces were like the faces of lions and were swift as the roe upon the mountains" (v8), and again, "These are they that went over Jordan in the first month when it overflowed all its banks and they put to flight all of them of the valleys both towards the east and towards the west" (v15). So from Gilead David obtained some of his most resourceful and hardy warriors who, plunging down the escarpment from the heights of Gilead, with faces like lions and feet as swift as the roe upon the mountains, swimming the Jordan in the first month when the river would have overflowed all its banks, immediately put to flight all the enemies of David both in the valleys towards the east and the west. It is a vivid picture of the power and the hardiness of these inhabitants of Gilead. Again, in Joshua chapter 17, we have a testimony to the strength of those inhabitants that came from this region; "there was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh; for he was the firstborn of Joseph; to wit, for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead: *because he was a man of war, therefore, he had Gilead and Bashan.*"

Here then was the region from whence Elijah came and one writer in describing this land and its relationship to Elijah put it this way, "There was a wonderful similarity between the man and the region, stern, bleak, grand, majestic and awful were they both".

v1. "*LORD God of Israel liveth*" - Two momentous issues are implicit in the use of this title before Ahab. One, God was indeed the God of Israel as opposed to the Phoenician gods, and two, He was the living God as opposed to the fact that those idols which had now mesmerised Ahab were dead (cp.1 Kings 18:26).

"*before whom I stand*" - that is, as a willing servant. Note the phrase is repeated in 18:15 and is also used by Elisha (2 Kings 3:14; 5:16).

"*not be dew nor rain*" - Dew and rain are symbols of God's refreshing doctrine (Deut.32:2). The rain comes down from heaven and saturates the earth causing it to bring forth those things that are sown in it, which in themselves are symbols of the fruits of righteousness which we should bring forth in response to the heavenly blessings of the water of the Word (see Isa.55:8-11). Jesus Christ as the great "latter rain" will revive the earth by his influence, and in that day he shall "come down upon the mown grass" to cause the earth to bring forth fruits to the glory of God such as no other age has ever produced (Psa.72:6). On the other hand the dew,

being much more gentle in its descent, is a symbol of the persuasiveness and gentleness of the Truth of God when applied to those who allow it to settle in their hearts and bring forth the response for which it calls. However one of the curses with which Israel was threatened was that rain would be withheld from them, that heaven would be "shut up", as a punishment for apostasy (see Deut.11:17).

The story of Elijah has far-reaching ramifications. It contains a parabolic content and prefigures the purpose of God with His people. In Revelation chapter 11 the withholding of rain in the days of Ahab is taken up by the Revelator as illustrative of the way that God's blessings would be denied the earth because of the curse of the Roman apostasy. In that chapter we have the story of God's two witnesses who stand before "the god of the earth" (v4) who is the Roman monarch, the apostasy in that day. Because this apostate system so bitterly and violently opposed the testimony of God's true witnesses He gave into their hands the authority to "shut heaven" (v6). This they were able to do by withholding the power of God's testimony from those who would not hear it; so heaven's blessings would not come upon them, of which the rain was but typical. These conditions existed for a period of 42 months (v2) which is a period of three and a half years, the same time period in which rain was withheld from the apostate system in Israel by the word of Elijah (see James 5:17).

It is also not without significance that this was exactly the period of our Lord's ministry, from the baptism of John in the river Jordan at the age of 30 until three and a half years later when he gave up his life on the tree that men might have it more abundantly. In the words of the prophet, Jesus the servant of Yahweh, was a root which rose up out of a dry ground (Isa.53:1-2). During the time when Israel was gripped with a spiritual drought, God's blessings came in the form of the Lord Jesus Christ who "came down from heaven" that he might bring blessings to those people who were prepared to let the Word of God saturate their hearts. During the course of his ministry, as also with that of Elijah, the persecution of the saints continued unabated, and it is interesting that this period of three and a half years or 42 months of 1,260 days, is the period chosen by the prophets to signify the time factors in which the saints would be persecuted by the civil powers of the times (Dan. 7:25; Rev.11:3; 13:5-7). So it was in Elijah's time, during the three and a half year drought, that Jezebel also endeavoured to destroy the prophets of Yahweh from Israel (1 Kings 18:4, 22; 2 Kings 9:7).

"but according to my word" - In the ultimate sense God alone had the power to withhold or to send rain, but here we see a wonderful principle of the Scriptures being enacted for us. It proved true that rain did not come until Elijah exercised himself in prayer upon the top of mount Carmel, the incident being recorded in 1 Kings, chapter 18 and upon which James comments that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:17). Yet there is even more in this statement than the fact that rain would come according to the word of Elijah, for clearly implicit in these words is the fact that Elijah's presence would be equated with the sending of rain. In this way the doctrine of God-manifestation, i.e. the manner in which God channels His purpose through individuals was clearly seen. No Elijah - no rain. Whilst many would have scoffed at this message, disbelieving

the new prophet, yet when the drought did grip Israel as if in an iron furnace, the ground became parched and cracked and men and beast wandered looking for moisture, it became absolutely urgent then that they should find the prophet. The truth of his message began to come home to them that they would not see rain until they saw him.



CHAPTER 3 - 1 KINGS 17:2-24

ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

Elijah is a legendary figure even among people not holding the truth, his exploits have gone down in history as some of the most dramatic ever recorded. He will always be remembered as a gaunt awe-inspiring figure who brought a measure of terror into Israel as he breezed through the nation denouncing the ungodliness of that generation, bringing down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, destroying the prophets of Baal, racing before the chariot of Ahab. Yet those events for which he is more readily remembered only speak of destruction. The only recorded human "monument" that he left upon the earth, as a positive result of his work is this widow woman of Zarephath. Much of the prophet's ministry, short though it was, was taken up in ministering to this woman. Yahweh had a place for her in His purpose and it was providential that the circumstances of the drought should drive the great Elijah into her humble household, there to find sustenance in a time when all the rest of Israel was parched without moisture from heaven. Jesus drew attention to the important principle contained in this story in words recorded in Luke 4:25 when he said that, "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow". The comment of the Lord could appear as a caption to 1st Kings, chapter 17, indicating the tender care and the providential help of Yahweh towards those, whoever they may be, that respond to Him.

2 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Chē'-rith, that is before Jōr-dān.

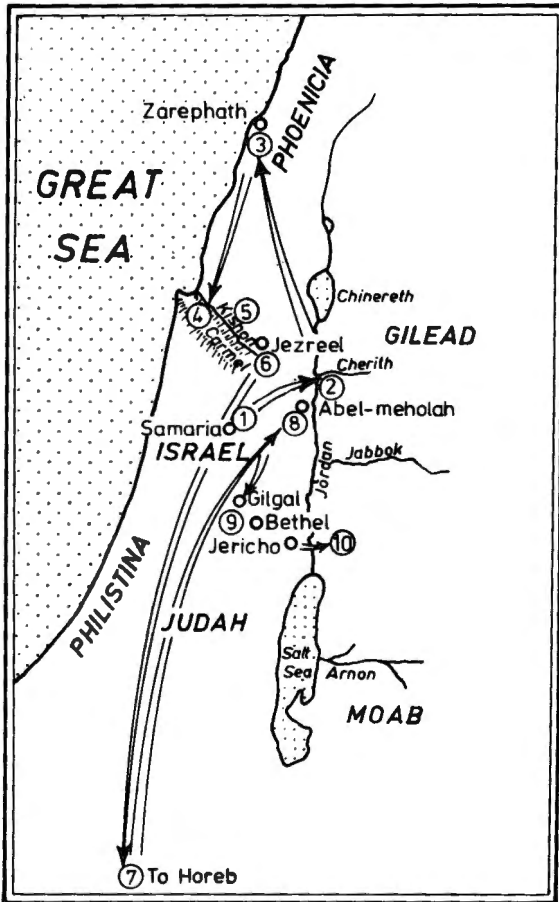
4 And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

v3. "*Brook Cherith*" - This small stream was located east of Jordan in the northern section of the land of Gilead, emptying itself into the river Jordan, from thence plunging to the Dead Sea. The word "Cherith" means "cut off", "separation" which was the principle of Elijah's life. However we believe that the significance of this

meaning did not apply to Elijah, but to the lessons that he was to learn here.

"*before Jordan*" - Literally interpreted this means "facing Jordan", in the sense of "emptying itself" into the Jordan. Jordan stood also for the principle of separation, seeing that it was the Jordan river running in the bed of a great gulf, or depression, which separated the land of Israel from the land of death, on the east side from where Israel had come after crossing the river. When the Lord Jesus Christ stepped into this stream to be baptized of John it was to fulfil all righteousness and to declare the truth of the message of John that all flesh was grass. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest of all mankind, came to declare the separation between flesh and spirit, the separation between serving oneself and serving God.

v4. "*I have commanded the ravens*" - Here was a most unusual thing. The raven was an unclean bird and to be had in abomination by the children of Israel (Lev. 11:13-15; Deut. 14:14). No doubt it was categorised as unclean to teach an object lesson to the children of Israel that they should not partake of those creatures



(1) Jezebel, the Phoenician wife of Ahab, makes determined attempts to introduce the immoral practices of the cult of Baal to Israel, and is opposed by the prophet Elijah.

(2) Elijah prophesies that there will be no rain for many years, thus meeting the prophets of Baal on their own ground as nature-worshippers, and retires to the Brook Cherith, where he is fed by ravens.

(3) Elijah raises to life the son of the widow of Zarephath during the famine, and the cruse remains full.

(4) Mount Carmel is the scene of the famous contest between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah proves that God can send rain as well as withhold it.

(5) Elijah kills the prophets of Baal by the River Kishon. Elijah tells Ahab to flee to Jezreel before the coming storm overtakes him.

(6) Elijah runs before Ahab's chariot to Jezreel.

(7) Jezebel incites Ahab to take revenge on Elijah and the prophet flees to Horeb. He prays

for death but God speaks to him, not through the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but by a still small voice, and comforts him.

(8) Elijah returns to call Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah.

Ahab covets Naboth's vineyard and incites Jezebel, who has him stoned. Elijah condemns Ahab in field of Naboth.

(9) After visiting Ahaziah, Elijah and Elisha leave Gilgal, go down to Bethel and Jericho.

(10) They cross the Jordan and Elijah is taken into heaven in a whirlwind.

which were scavengers. Also the raven was noted for the crude habit of picking out the eyes of its victims (Prov.30:17). One of the most notable characteristics of the raven which the Scripture takes cognisance of is the difficulty that the raven has in finding its food, a lesson which the Lord Jesus Christ took from these small birds (Luke 12:24, see also Psa.147:9). There is one other reference to the raven's difficulty in finding food, and because of its relevance to this story we quote it in full. "Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat" (Job 38:41).

5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Chê-rith, that is before Jôr-dân.

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.

For the great prophet in Gilead here was a wonderful lesson in humility. The references above reveal the raven as a symbol of dependence upon God, yet morning by morning the prophet had to hold his hand out to receive food from such a bird! Not only was the raven unclean, but how pitiful the bird must have appeared to Elijah as it let drop into his hand the precious meat which it could so scarcely afford.

Humility was not the only lesson, however, that Elijah was to learn. Like Peter who was strongly biased against the Gentiles being called into the Truth of God, Elijah had to learn that "that which God had cleansed they were not to call common or



Ravens feeding Elijah beside the brook Cherith

unclean' (Acts 10:12-15). Elijah was about to be sent upon one of the greatest missions in his life, taking the truth of God's Word out of Israel into the city of Zidon in the region of Zarephath, a district notorious for its idolatry. This would be a severe test of his faith, for which he needed this education before he went, that he might appreciate the goodness of God in calling those normally regarded as unclean, to the purity of the faith of Israel's hope.

v7. *"after a while"* - The margin indicates that the Hebrew phrase signifies "at the end of days". Some understand this to be an expression denoting a full year.

"the brook dried up" - This would be another test of his faith. Elijah must have wondered as to where his sustenance would now come from.

v8. *"And the word of Yahweh came unto him saying"* - This was the motivating force of his life. Ten times in the life of Elijah it is mentioned that he was motivated by the word of Yahweh, propelling him from place to place that the Creator's purpose might be served. This time it was to move him towards Zarephath. Elijah would naturally be reluctant to go into that Gentile direction. However, as with all the other occasions where the Word of Yahweh moved him, Elijah shows a faithful and a simple obedience to the command.

8 ¶ And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,
 9 Arise, get thee to ^aZār-ē-phāth, which *belongeth* to ^bZi'-dōn, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

v9. *"Arise, get thee to Zarephath"* - This city was on the coast between Tyre and Zidon, about 8 miles from Zidon, the very city from which Jezebel had come. No wonder Ahab and the rest of Israel could not find him, for scarcely would they think to look

for the prophet in the place from which his bitterest enemy had come! "Zarephath" means "refinement", "a place of smelting furnaces" and indeed for the widow of Zarephath the arrival of Elijah was to be a fiery trial which would severely test her faith, now beginning to develop, as she began to perceive and appreciate the reason for this drought.

"to Zidon" - The meaning of this name, "catching fish", is also interesting. Here in the hometown of Jezebel, in the centre of Baal worship, Elijah came to be a fisher of men (cp. Luke 5:10). They were hunting everywhere for him (1 Kings 18:10) whilst he was in Zarephath to catch others in the net of Israel's hope that there may be, even in Jezebel's town, those who would show great faith, which at that time was not extant, even among the people of Israel. How pertinent are the Lord's comments when, in the context of this story concerning Elijah being sent to the widow of Zarephath, he says; "no prophet is accepted in his own country" (Luke 4:24).

"I have commanded" - No doubt this was done by Yahweh's providential supervision and not by direct command, as the woman at this stage would not have been sufficiently prepared in mind to understand the true nature of the God who would have revealed this to her.

"a widow woman" - Hundreds of years later Jesus himself came into this very district there to meet a Syro-Phoenician woman, described also as a woman of Canaan

(Mark 7:24-30; Matt.15:21-28). It was that woman who called him "the son of David". Even in her remote isolation from Israel she had come to appreciate the wonder of the promises made to the fathers of Israel; in fact she perceived their significance far better than many in Israel even though the oracles of God had been committed unto them (Rom.3:2). This woman's faith gained for her daughter the healing favour of the Lord who was greatly impressed to hear her humble enunciation of the truth. She was prepared to acknowledge that it was not meet that he should take the 'children's bread', that is the children of Israel's bread, and cast it to 'dogs', that is, Gentiles, like herself, outside of the confines and influence of the truth of God. The woman's acceptance of this humiliating fact was the pre-requisite to her receiving the blessing from God. The Lord must have been delighted with her faith especially when he compared it with the conversion of the widow of old under the ministration of Elijah.

"to sustain thee" - In the social system under which Israel lived, the widow was the epitome of dependence upon others for sustenance. Scattered throughout the Scripture there is reference to the fact that Yahweh had become a champion of the widows and expected the ecclesia to show the same regard (see Psa.68:5; James 1:27). To be told that one was to be sustained "by a widow" would seem almost outrageous, for how could such an one sustain another when she herself was completely dependent upon the help of others!

Comment: Consider the reaction of Elijah to such a command that he would penetrate into the very territory of his most bitter opponent! Being associated with the people of Israel he would naturally recoil from entering into any of the paths of the Gentiles. How much more when that way would take him into the very centre of Baal worship which, to his great dismay and abhorrence, now rooted itself in Israel and supplanted the worship of Yahweh. There are five good reasons which Elijah could have thought were sufficient to argue the case against obeying the command to go to Zarephath.

1. It was a long journey, nearly 100 miles, at a time of extreme drought.
2. It would take him close to Zidon, the native area of his bitterest enemy.
3. A widow woman of this region would doubtless be steeped in idolatry.
4. Being a widow she had lost her earthly sustainer and therefore what could she do for him?
5. In any case how would he find her?

v10. *"So he arose"* - Despite the possibility of these things arising in Elijah's mind, here was his obedience of faith!

"when he came to the gate of the city" - The gate of the city was a place of prominence. There is an exclamation here in the Hebrew; Rotherham has "Lo!". What an amazing thing that he should find her right at the gate! Yahweh's providence had brought him face to face with the very woman. The fact that she was outside that gate gathering sticks, that she might go home to produce her last meal for her dying son and herself, should have caused Elijah to reflect upon his stay at the brook Cherith, where the ravens from day to day brought him the sustenance of life. We

can see why it is that the quotation from Job 38:41 had such relevance to this situation, for was not this “unclean” woman “wandering for the lack of meat” and her “young one crying” for food, and was it not a fact that Yahweh from Heaven, knowing the response that was in the heart of this woman, looked down from above and made adequate provision? “Who provideth for the raven her food?” We may well ask.

10 So he arose and went to Zār'-ē-phāth. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, 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 thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

“Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink” - A cup of cold water is not much to give at any time, except perhaps in the time of extreme drought! Bear in mind that the drought had lasted for nearly 12 months and the woman would now find water a very precious commodity.

v11. *“as she was going”* - Her response was immediate! Without further questioning she turned to fetch him the water. As the woman turned about and departed, Elijah sent another message over her shoulder which was a greater test of her faith and one which almost caused her to stumble at his word.

“Bring me I pray thee a morsel of bread in thy hand” - Here was the supreme test of her faith. We speak of faith because obviously, without contact with Elijah, she had come to certain conclusions concerning the drought and its connections both with Elijah and the LORD God of Israel. The supreme test of faith was very much the same as the Lord Jesus Christ offered to the woman of Syro-Phoenicia (Mark 7:24-30). In both cases the women were in desperate straits and were in no position to bargain with Yahweh. Nevertheless to give to a prophet of Israel her last morsel of meal, so desperately needed for the life of her son, was something very difficult indeed, and we have to appreciate the severe test under which she was then put.

v12. *“And she said, As Yahweh thy God liveth”* - Two mighty truths were acknowledged in this statement. The first, “thy God”; in this she recognised that Elijah was a prophet of Yahweh. No doubt his very physical appearance was sufficient for her to recognise him without introduction (see 2 Kings 1:8). The second, “Yahweh ... liveth”. In that statement there is clearly implied that gods of a different nature were not living gods at all. Here was not only confession of her faith in Israel’s God but a denial in what she could have previously believed concerning the gods of the heathen. Not only were these two matters implicit in her statement, but we could perhaps also attribute to her the understanding that the drought was a direct responsibility of the God of Israel. Yahweh lives and the sore drought upon His land was therefore no chance state of affairs. As the story unfolds we perceive the growing perception and faith of this woman. Her first words, “thy God”, imply that she herself was not yet a true worshipper. Later she progresses to the point where she calls him a “man of God” (v18) recognising Elijah not only as a servant of his God but who now was the *manifestation* of the God that he served. Finally, after the resurrection of her dead son, the woman came to a full realisation of the truth when she said to Elijah, “the word of Yahweh in thy mouth is truth” (v24).

12 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.

13 And E-li'-jäh said unto her, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

"handful of meal" - Whether she understood this or not, this amount was Yahweh's portion of the meal offering given to the priest as "his handful" which he burnt upon the altar (Lev.2:2; 5:12; 6:15; 9:17). The meal offering was the offering through which the worshipper, though only giving a handful of his portion in dedication unto Yahweh upon the altar, acknowledged that

"the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Psa.24:1). It became, therefore, the offering of acknowledgement, cp. the use of "minchah" ("meal offering") in Psa. 45:12 ("gift") Mal.1:11 ("pure offering").

"a little oil" - Zarephath was in the territory of Asher (Josh.19:28), a territory noted for its production of the olive oil (Deut.33:24). However, the drought would severely restrict production and this woman only had a little oil left in a cruse.

"two sticks" - The Hebrew word indicates "double"; the RSV renders this word "a couple", emphasising the misery of her state.

v13. *"but make me thereof a little cake first"* - Here was Elijah's insistence on the test of her faith; (as we have noted before the same test offered of the Syro-Phoenician woman) that the children must *first* be filled (Mark 7:27). The woman had to come to realise that God's blessings were first to the Jew before they could ever be poured out upon the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus Christ who accosted a woman, also of Gentile extraction, when he sat at Joseph's well in Samaria, brought her attention to the same basic truth when, in John 4:22, he pointed out that "salvation is of the Jews". It will be no different in the future age when the Lord Jesus Christ returns as the King of Israel. The same offer of salvation will be made to all the world on the basis of humility and the test of that humility will be the acceptance of Israel. The nations who would be accepted of Yahweh in that day shall "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew" (Zech.8:23). The very use here of the term "Jew", as a contraction of the word "Judah", is important to the context, as it was by this term that Israelites became known as objects of contempt (Neh.4:1-3; Esther 3:4).

v14. *"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel"* - Elijah is careful to give Yahweh this title in order that he may distinguish Him from the gods of the Phoenicians.

"shall not waste" - Under the conditions of extreme drought the produce of the field is not available for the meal and the oil so necessary for the presentation of this offering to Yahweh. The meal and the drink offerings were symbols of acknowledgement as well as of joy and gladness so their absence was a symbol of sadness and mourning (Joel 1:8, 12). But humility will gain a meal offering and drink offering from Yahweh even in times of difficulty (Joel 2:12-14).

"Yahweh sendeth rain upon the earth" - Previously Elijah had announced to Ahab that there would not be rain nor dew upon the earth but "according to my word"

(17:1). This statement is not contradictory to the fact that Yahweh is the controller of rain (see Psa.135:7; Amos 4:7). We have previously shown that the coming of rain and the appearance of Elijah were closely linked together in order that the doctrine of God-manifestation might be clearly demonstrated to Israel. They came to understand that though Yahweh would indeed send rain upon the earth yet the coming of the rain and the coming of His prophet would be synonymous (cp. Psa. 72:6).

14 For thus saith the LORD God of Īs'-rā-ēl, 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.

15 And she went and did according to the saying of E-li'-jāh: 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 spake by E-li'-jāh.

v15. "*she went*" - Here is faith in action. Just as in v11, no hesitation whatever is indicated.

"*did eat many days*" - Note the margin which says "a full year".

However, when we look back at v7 and consider that the expression "after a while" possibly means 12 months, then the

term here is more likely to mean two years, because we know from Luke 4:25 and James 5:17 that the drought lasted for a period of three and a half years. With the constant supply of oil in the cruse and the barrel of meal not wasting over that period of time, the widow would certainly learn the principles enunciated so beautifully in Prov.3:9-10.

"Honour Yahweh with thy substance, and with the *FIRST*-fruits of all thine increase;

SO shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine!"

v16. "*neither did the cruse of oil fail*" - Yahweh did not give super-abundance to the widow but provided her with the daily necessities of life. For her He had fulfilled the request expressed so many years later by the Lord Jesus Christ in "The Lord's Prayer" where he said, "give us the bread of tomorrow" (Matt.6:11 RSV footnote).

Comment: Thus far the widow's faith had been sufficient to match the demands made upon her by Elijah. She had learned by her faith to put God's prophets first and to acknowledge that there was a God in Israel. By this means Yahweh had provided her with the necessities of life. The widow would have lived a very thankful existence under the guiding protection of the prophet of Yahweh and doubtless would have thrilled to the lessons that he had to teach her. However, a greater trial was yet to come upon the woman which, in a lesser person, could have shattered all her growing faith in the God of Israel and sent her back to her previous way of life.

v17. "*the mistress of the house*" - The Hebrew word here for "mistress" is "baalah" and it is rendered "mistress" twice here and in Nahum 3:4 (where it is in the context of "the mistress of witchcrafts"). Rotherham has, "owner of the house". The word is also twice rendered "that hath" in the phrase "that hath a fam-

iliar spirit" in 1 Sam.28:7, 9 in relation to the witch of Endor. Youngs Literal translation, commenting upon this word, says that it means "possessing", and this word was perhaps chosen by the Spirit to imply that there still lingered in this house remnants of Baal worship. Events about to happen were to be her final trial which were to dispel for ever any doubts the woman may have still felt and to cement her in her new-found relationship with the God of Israel and with his prophet Elijah.

"*there was not breath left in him*" - The Hebrew word is "Neshemah" which, in Gen.2:7, is "the breath of life"; in other words, he *died*.

v18. "*O thou man of God*" - Contrast her statement in v12. where she sees him as a servant of Yahweh Elohim. The expression "a man of God" was the regular Israelitish description of her own prophets; for example, Jud.13:6; 12:22; 13:1. The use of the term indicates the woman's growing recognition of Elijah.

"*call my sin to remembrance*" - This was at once the reaction both to her conviction that she held a special relationship to Yahweh for which He now held her accountable, and also was the expression of her sense of humility which in these circumstances was highly commendable. She did not blame Yahweh for what had happened; the widow immediately looked inwards for any cause that may have brought about this calamity in her life. She did not question the Creator but merely

17 ¶ 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.

18 And she said unto E-li'-jäh, "What have I to do with thee, O thou ^a man of God? art thou come unto me ^b to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

19 And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

wondered in herself for what reason, for what particular sin, this matter had come upon her. In this regard she was like many other of the faithful people in Israel, who would express themselves in a similar fashion, understanding their own weaknesses before the Creator, and the fact that He cannot look upon iniquity with any degree of allowance. (For example, Job 42:5-6; Jud.6:22; 13:22; Luke 5:8.)

"*he took him out of her bosom*" - We have here a pathetic picture of the grief of

the widow. Yet it was absolutely necessary that she part with her dead son that he might be identified with the prophet, before life could ever be imparted to him.

"*up into a loft*" - The Hebrew word "loft" signifies "something lofty", "going up". It is rendered by the word "chamber" in v24. The son was to be the subject of a resurrection!

"*upon his own bed*" - In this way the prophet commenced a process of identification with himself as "the man of God" (v18). This act would strengthen her conviction as she saw herself increasingly identified with the prophet in whom she had now recognised the spirit of life. There is a remarkable similarity between the resurrection of this widow's son and the resurrection of the Shunammite woman's son, as recorded in 2 Kings 4, where once again, the prophet Elisha in a most elaborate fashion associated himself with that boy. Through the principle of identification with the prophet of God, the boy's life revived within him.

v20. *"O Lord my God"* - Even though Elijah was to make elaborate preparations and to identify himself very strongly with this boy, yet under no circumstances was it to be imagined that the power could come from anyone else than Yahweh on high. The fact that he spoke of Yahweh as "My God" indicates the close intimacy that Elijah enjoyed with his Heavenly Father and it was by means of that connection, the manifestation of God in him, that life was passed to the son through the prophet. The widow came to understand Elijah's exalted position as she had never understood it before.

v21. *"And he stretched himself"* - The Hebrew means "to measure" (note the marginal rendition) and this is the only place where the word is rendered "stretched". Elisha also underwent this elaborate process in the method of healing the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4:34). With that prophet even his dead bones imparted life when one was lowered upon them (2 Kings 13:21). Similarly when Paul was at Troas and spoke long into the night and the young man Eutychus fell out of the window, it was only by virtue of Paul running down and embracing the lad - thus identifying himself with him - that his life came again into him (Acts 20:10). In this way the disciples were vividly impressed not only with the power of God, which was the primary lesson, of course, but also by the fact that that power was now channelled through the great apostle, therefore they would give the more earnest heed to the things which he spoke. There is no doubt that the healing virtue lay in the prayer, yet Yahweh required that the human channel of His Grace practise the virtues of God who so used him, so making the identification complete. The Lord Jesus Christ for example in healing a woman noted that virtue "went out of him" (Luke 6:19), and thus he would understand that although the power from on high was the power to heal the woman, the channel of its manifestation was through himself and thus a great responsibility rested upon him as it did with the prophet on this occasion (cp. John 17:19).

"three times" - The fact that this procedure was performed thrice adds to the intensity of the occasion and that identification was the principle through which resurrection came.

20 And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

21 ^aAnd he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

22 And ^cthe LORD heard the voice of E-lí-jáh; ^dand the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

23 And E-lí-jáh took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and E-lí-jáh said, See, thy son liveth.

v22. *"Yahweh heard the voice of Elijah"* - This is important as we would understand that the woman would have offered very fervent prayers for the resurrection of her son yet the channel of divine communication was through the prophet and in no other way could life come to the boy.

"the soul of the child came again" - Hebrew for "soul" is "nephesh" translated "life" (Gen.9:4; Deut.12:23; Lev.17:11).

v24. *"Now by this"* - The woman's faith was complete and the convincing factor

was the resurrection. Even so it is with us; the Lord Jesus Christ died that we might live but the fact of his resurrection convinced all that God was indeed operative in

the case. This then became the basis of apostolic preaching (Acts 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:14). It is only by our positive identification with the Lord Jesus Christ (by measuring our life along-side of his in the waters of baptism and having that righteousness attributed to us which belongs to him and which is available through our faith), that we can be identified with the Lord of life and so live everlastingly (see Rom.6:1-6).

24 ¶ And the woman said to E-lī-jāh, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

"the word of Yahweh in thy mouth is truth"

Not only was the woman fully convinced by the resurrection of her son that Elijah truly was a man of God, but also that everything he had said must have represented truth. Consequently all that she had ever learned from him would now cement in her mind! There was upon the earth a woman called out of the Gentiles for Yahweh's name! Elijah had left the land of Israel parched beneath the searing heat of the Palestinian sun, with the earth cracking for lack of moisture from heaven. The brazen sky and the burnished earth were but symbolic representations of the barrenness of Israel's heart and mind as they went without the moisture from God and were shrivelling up in unbelief of the things concerning His goodness (Deut.28:23). Yet here in the land of Gentiles, the very centre of Baal worship and the home town of Jezebel, the prophet Elijah had come and with him the blessings from God.

CHAPTER 4 - 1 KINGS 18:1-16

ELIJAH REVEALS HIMSELF TO OBADIAH

Yahweh's purpose with the widow was now accomplished. Elijah had not been sent to any such widow in Israel as the Lord Jesus Christ commented in Luke chapter 4. Now he is to go back to Israel on another mission intended to shake the nation to its foundations that it might rise from its apathy into the marvellous light of the Creator's truth.

v1. *"the word of Yahweh came to Elijah in the third year"* - The period of drought was a three-and-a-half-year period (Luke 4:25; James 5:17). This must then have been the third year since he went to Zarephath. We are given no definite dates as to the divisions of this three-and-a-half-year period but suggest that probably he was one year at Cherith, two years at Zarephath and now in the third year he enters back into Israel; the three-and-a-half-year period of drought is almost complete.

CHAPTER 18

AND it came to pass *after many days*, that the word of the LORD came to ^hE-li'jäh in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto ^{Ä'}häh; and ⁱI will send rain upon the earth.

2 And ^{E-l'}jäh went to shew himself unto ^{Ä'}häh. And *there was a sore* ^hfamine in Sä-mär'i-ä.

"Go, shew thyself unto Ahab" - Obedience to this command would immediately imperil his life but the prophet acts immediately and makes his way back into the land that he had left in such dire necessity. Note too how his personal appearance is absolutely necessary as a demonstration that the power of God would be channelled through him.

Without him there would be no rain. It would be on the basis of this identification ("according to *my word*", 17:1), that the promise of rain would come. Later, in the contest with the prophets of Baal upon Carmel, he made a great point about this identification (1 Kings 18:36). He thus drew attention to himself as the medium not only of the divine manifestation of physical power, but also the channel of the divine invitation for all Israel to escape the corruption that was in the world through lust and the idolatry of Baal worship.

"I will send rain upon the earth" - Rain comes as a blessing for obedience (Deut. 28:12). The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will also bring the rain of God's doctrine upon the earth (2 Sam.23:4; Psa.72:6) through which all mankind will be blessed in the obedience of faith.

v3. *"Obadiah"* - The meaning of this man's name was "the servant of Yahweh".

"the governor of his house" - The Hebrew word is "all", "most high", "in charge of"; note the marginal rendition "over his house". Here is a remarkable testimony to the industry and integrity of this man Obadiah. Even with Jezebel in control, he was able to rise to great prominence in Ahab's house without compromising the Truth. In this respect he is very similar to Joseph who was able to rise to fame in Pharaoh's house without betraying his faith in God. The same is true of David in Saul's house and of Daniel who served before king Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Not only did Obadiah rise to this great position but he did so because Ahab had trust and confidence in him (cp.v6).

"Now Obadiah feared Yahweh greatly" - "Greatly" is in the sense of "diligently, especially". Note also from verse 12 that this fear of Yahweh was something which he had maintained from his very youth.

v4. "when Jezebel cut off the prophets" - This is the first recorded instance of persecution of the saints by a civil authority and is the prototype of that great Roman apostasy which through its civil administration has brought such dreadful persecution and bloodshed upon the early Christian communities. The Lord Jesus Christ, in denouncing that whorish system, used words that reach right back to this very verse of Scripture when he said "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all that was slain upon the earth" (Rev.18:24).

3 And **Ā'-hāb** called **Ō-bā-dī'-āh**, which was the "governor of his house. (Now **Ō-bā-dī'-āh** feared the LORD greatly:

4 For it was so, when **ᵑ Jēz'-ē-bēl** cut off the prophets of the LORD, that **Ō-bā-dī'-āh** took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)

6 So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: **Ā'-hāb** went one way by himself, and **Ō-bā-dī'-āh** went another way by himself.

7 ¶ And as **Ō-bā-dī'-āh** was in the way, behold, **E-lī'-jāh** met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, *Art thou that my lord E-lī'-jāh?*

"by fifty in a cave" - Obadiah's faith and consistent attitude before Yahweh maintained from his youth was equally matched by his courage. Although occupying a position of prominence in Ahab's court right under the eye of Jezebel, he was able to manipulate the 100 prophets, 50 at a time, into caves of the earth to hide them from the wrath of the queen of iniquity. It could be that these were some of the prophets that Paul had in mind when he spoke about those faithful people in Hebrews chapter eleven who lived in "dens and caves of the earth" (Heb.11:38).

"fed them with bread and water" - Imagine how difficult this would have been in the time of drought and how difficult also it would have been to conceal the matter with much bread and water being necessary to feed one hundred men.

v6. "So they divided the land between them" - Here we have an indication of the trust and confidence that Ahab placed in Obadiah; he going one way and Obadiah going the other. It is significant that Yahweh revealed Elijah to Obadiah first as though He gave some recognition and support to the cause of that man who had acted so faithfully even under the threat of Jezebel's wrath.

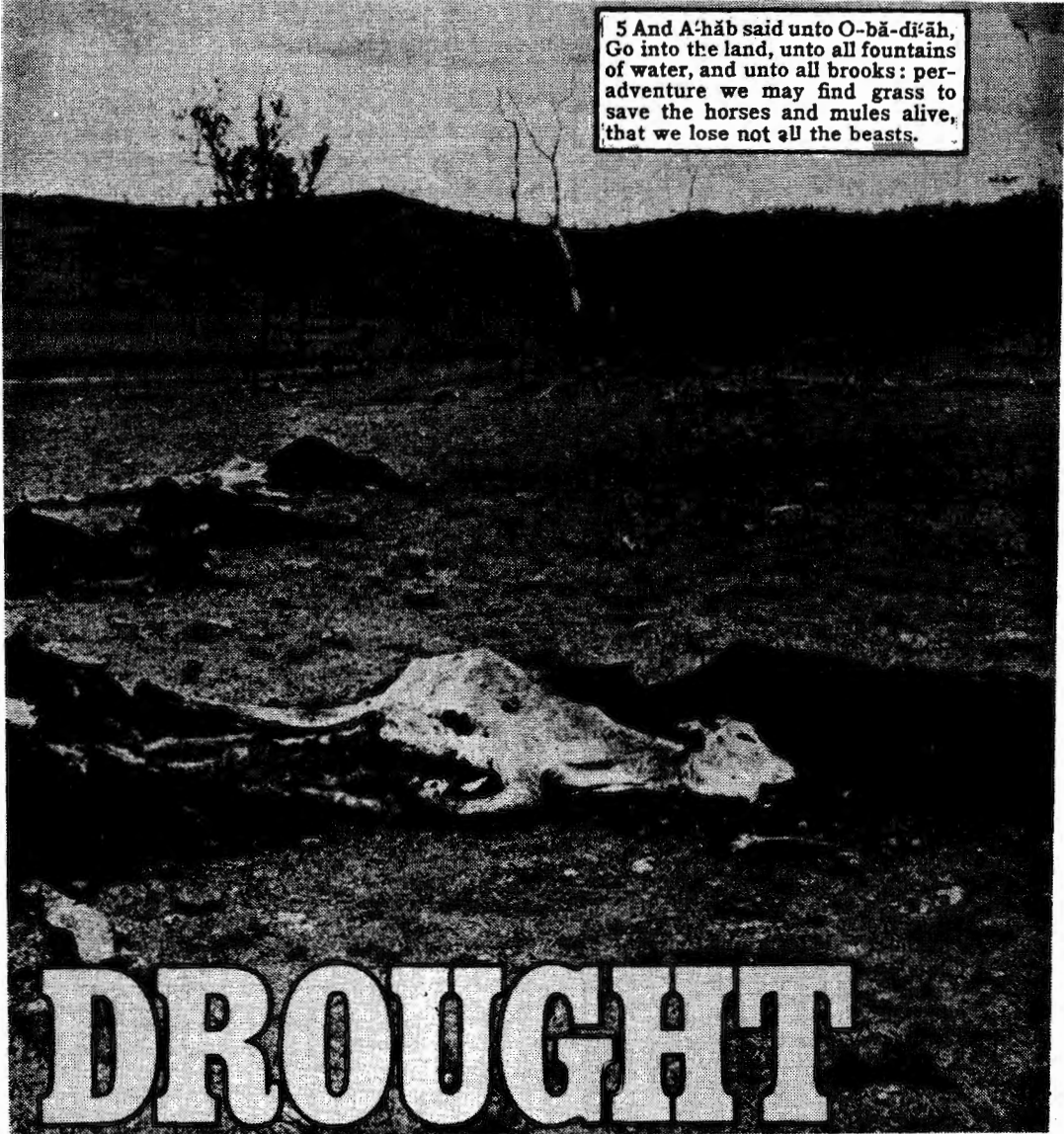
v7. "and he knew him" - Probably Obadiah recognised Elijah from personal contact in the past. However, even if he had not known him previously, Elijah's physical appearance was enough for anyone to recognise him as his appearance was like no other man in Israel (see 2 Kings 1:8).

"Art thou that my lord Elijah?" - The Septuagint version renders this "Is it thy very self my Lord Elijah?". The exclamation of Obadiah here seems to indicate that he could scarcely believe his eyes. He addresses Elijah with the greatest respect according him the title of 'adon', 'my lord', thereby recognising his own subservience to Elijah and his identification with his cause.

v8. "he answered him, I am" - Remove the words in italics and we have the simple

"I". Rotherham notes that the expression is very abrupt and very emphatic.

"go, tell thy lord" - Note Elijah's expression to Obadiah, "thy lord", referring to Ahab. Elijah seems to have an aloof bearing before Obadiah; his expression to Yahweh later on at Sinai, "I, I only am left" seems to indicate his intolerance of all others, whom he deemed as having "forsaken thy covenant". Throughout this discourse with Obadiah, the mighty prophet from Gilead seems quite distant from the



5 And A'hāb said unto O-bā-dī'āh, 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.

DROUGHT

man who had acted so faithfully under Jezebel, and fails to recognise that in Obadiah he could have had a very wonderful ally.

8 And he answered him, *I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Ē-lī'-jāh is here.*

9 And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ā'-hāb, to slay me?

10 ^b As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, *He is not there*; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.

11 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Ē-lī'-jāh *is here.*

12 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 Ā'-hāb, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth.

13 Was it not told my lord what I did when Jēz'-ē-bēl slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

"Behold, Elijah is here" - Again we remove the words in italics which are no part of the original Hebrew; the expression is "Lo, Elijah!" He stands the dignified representative of Yahweh.

v10. *"As Yahweh thy God liveth"* - This is Obadiah's expression of faith. Again it is a clear recognition of Yahweh as the God of Israel and also that Yahweh lives. It also reveals a clear understanding of Elijah's association with that God and, consequently, Obadiah reveals in this section his complete identification with Yahweh and with His prophet and with the cause of that prophet.

14 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Ē-lī'-jāh *is here: and he shall slay me.*

15 And Ē-lī'-jāh said, *As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day.*

"no nation or kingdom" - This unremitting search for the mighty prophet reveals to us that even though Ahab might have treated Elijah's words lightly in the first instance, yet after three-and-a-half years of no rain they began to take him at his word, and to understand that without him there would be no rain; hence this search.

v12. *"the spirit of Yahweh shall carry thee whither I know not"* - Again Obadiah expresses his conviction of the close relationship that existed between the prophet and his God.

v13. *"Was it not told my lord"* - Here is a passionate appeal to impress his unity with Elijah's cause but it seems that Elijah remained unimpressed.

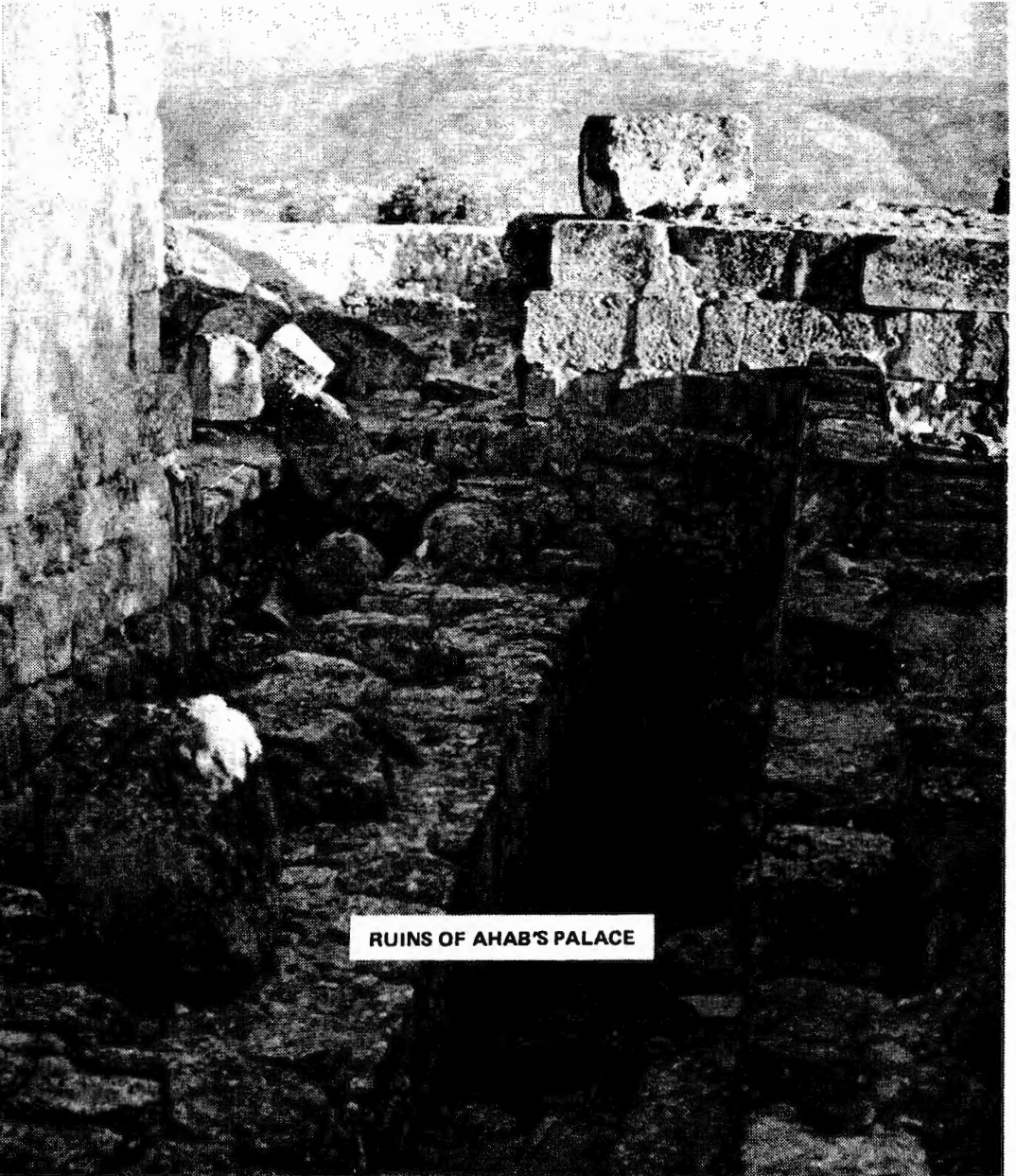
"when Jezebel slew the prophets of Yahweh" - This was a great act of faith performed in atmosphere of grave peril. Not only did Obadiah reveal in the statement that he was identified with the cause of Yahweh's prophets and, therefore Elijah was wrong to think that "I, I only am left", but that apart from himself there were one hundred other prophets as well, who were still in the service of Yahweh of Israel! As yet Elijah seems unimpressed.

v15. *"And Elijah said, As Yahweh of hosts liveth"* - What a significant change in the title here used by Elijah. Previously he had stood before Yahweh Elohim, now as he is about to reveal himself to the wicked king Ahab and to face that man in a spirit of belligerency, he sees, as his Protector and his Captain, "Yahweh of armies".

v16. *“And Ahab went to meet Elijah”* - In this clash of great personalities, representing two opposing religions, Elijah does not condescend to meet Ahab but (as Yahweh had caused him to be manifested first to Obadiah) he in turn sends Obadiah to Ahab. The king had to get off his throne and come to meet Elijah.

16 So O-bā-dī'-āh went to meet Ā'-hāb, and told him : and Ā'-hāb went to meet E-lī'-jāh.

Elijah stood aloof from the king, and in the great battle that was to ensue, it is the shaggy prophet that now issues the commands to the nation.



RUINS OF AHAB'S PALACE

CHAPTER 5 - 1 KINGS 18:17-29. ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

The wicked king was now going out to meet the righteous prophet. He who had purposefully set about the apostasising of Israel and had maximised the corruptive influence of his wife was now about to confront Yahweh's prophet. In this section the issues are joined. Ahab meets Elijah, error meets truth, folly meets wisdom, sin meets wickedness and Baal is confronted by the power of Yahweh manifested through the Word of the prophet! The people of Israel stand by in mute attention. They have no word to answer the prophet (v21) for they probably never had any true belief in Baal. Yet they had, in the perversity of human nature, changed the glory of the incorruptible God, Israel's own God, into 'an image made like to corruptible man'. Their foolish hearts were darkened in mysticism and evil but now, suddenly, it was so different as they stood under the hot, blue sky upon the heights of Carmel face to face with Elijah the prophet of Yahweh. The king and his people had paid a terrible price for their idolatry. Their flocks were decimated, their lands wasted and their families in a fearful state of famine. How long would they continue to hover between two opinions? "If Yahweh be God then follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." In their grave distress the people seemed ready to accept this proposition of the prophet; the contest was joined!

v17. "*Art thou he that troubleth Israel*" - "Troubleth" is from the same root as the word "achan" or "achar"; cf. Josh.6:18, 7:25-26; 1 Chron.2:7 (margin). It was at Jericho that Achan, "the troubler of Israel", sinned in the matter of taking from the city those objects of material splendour which his heart had coveted, and by which he had transgressed the commandment of Yahweh. The city of Jericho had been placed under a dreadful curse: that the rebuilders thereof would suffer the death of his children (Josh.6:26). This was fulfilled, in the case of Hiel where tragedy overtook his family (1 Kings 16:34). All this took place under the patronage of the king of Israel, Ahab! Who then was the troubler of Israel? It surely was not Elijah, but as the prophet pointed out, it was Ahab and his father's house.

v18. "*thou and thy father's house*" - Here was the root cause of trouble. Note Micah's comment upon the household of Omri and his son Ahab (Micah 6:16).

"*forsaken the commandments of Yahweh*" - When this happens Yahweh will forsake us (2 Chron.15:2).

"*Baalim*" - This is a plural term and the statement is contemptuous, referring to Baal and his many aspects as well as the other heathen gods. Elisha, Elijah's successor, had a similar contempt for Jehoram the son of Ahab who also worshipped a multiplicity of gods (2 Kings 3:13). To a true Israelite nothing was more abhorrent than the religion of polytheism, because the first principle of Israel's religion was, "Hear, O Israel Yahweh our God is one Yahweh" (Deut.6:4).

v19. "*gather to me all Israel*" - Here is the caption of his life's mission. The final gathering of Israel is to be to the Messiah (Gen.49:10) and it will be Elijah's job to effect that gathering in order that he might turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers (Mal.4:4-6).

17 ¶ And it came to pass, when Ā'hāb saw Ē-lī'jāh, that Ā'hāb said unto him, *q* Art thou he that *r* troubleth Īs'-rā-ēl?

18 And he answered, I have not troubled Īs'-rā-ēl; but thou, and thy father's house, in that *y* ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed 'Bā'ā-līm.

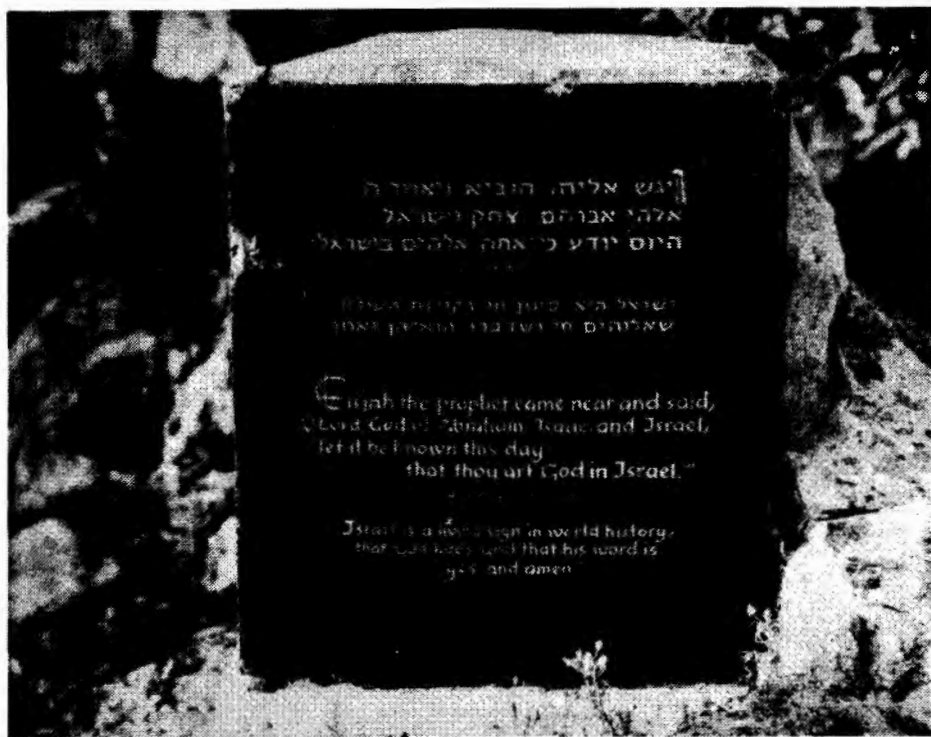
19 Now therefore send, and gather to me all Īs'-rā-ēl unto "mount Cār'mēl, and the *x* prophets of Bā'-āl four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the *z* groves four hundred, *z* which eat *a* at Jēz'-ē-bēl's table.

"unto mount Carmel" - Carmel signifies "a garden", "a park", from a root which means "to be fruitful" and is rendered by such terms as "fruitful field" (Isa.29:17; 32:15-16), "plentiful country" (Jer.2:7; 4:26). In the romance of the Song of Solomon the tresses of the bride's head are likened to the foliage of the heavily wooded head of Carmel which rippled in the wind off the Mediterranean Sea, giving a spectacular view to the watcher on the floor of the valley of Jezreel. (S. of S. 7:5). Carmel was a twelve mile

long range of mountains stretching north-west in a diagonal line from the pass of Megiddo to the western end of the valley of Jezreel ending abruptly some few hundred yards from the Mediterranean Sea where its shaggy head pointed out to sea. It was to this point that the seasonal rains first came as they swept in upon the north-western sector of Israel and consequently the head of Carmel became a symbol of fertility, a fruitful field, a garden park. (Jer.50:19, Micah 7:14). The prophet Isaiah in speaking of the great fruitfulness of the coming Kingdom likened it to the "excellency of Carmel" (Isa.35:2). When the green verdure and fruits of this garden park withered it was indeed a signal of a great and terrible disaster (Amos 1:2; Isa. 33:9; Nahum 1:4). Viewed from the north-east to the bottom end of the valley of Esdraelon this striking landmark, as it marched 12 miles to the ocean, looked for all the world like a gigantic finger pointing out to the sea. Thus it was used by the prophet as a pointer of the great judgments which were to come upon Israel for their disobedience (Jer.46:18).

Carmel will forever be associated with the great prophet of Gilead. Even today, near to the place where Elijah must have brought down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, there is a place which can be traced back through many traditions, named El-maharrakah "the burning". (See illustration) He could scarcely have chosen a better locality for the contest with the prophets of Baal. Their god was the god of the sun as well as the god of fertility; their god was to them the one responsible for all the fruits of the earth; he was, in their religion, the creator. Here on Carmel were all the things that symbolised creation, fertility and fruitfulness. From a strategic spot on Carmel the eye could take in a great sweep of territory, a miniature universe. Dropping away south from Carmel is the valley of Sharon with all its vineyards stretching away and blending with the yellow sands of the maritime coast which in turn becomes lost in the sea. Then sweeping one's eye to the right there is the broad expanse of the Mediterranean which to the Jewish mind was indicative of all that was beyond the shores and boundaries and hopes of Israel. Continuing the circle the eye would cross the coast again, almost directly north and would immediately begin to take in the ring of hills known as the region of Galilee, which means "ring". These piled up one upon another to higher and higher mountains until they abutted the abrupt nose of Hermon. This majestic mountain, the dominating feature of the northern aspect, began the long range of mountains known as the Anti-Lebanon Range. The blue face of these mountains, capped with sparkling snow reflected the sun from the glorious white that hung there all year round. Im-

mediately below the feet lay the floor of the valley of Jezreel, the fruitbowl of Israel. Jezreel means “God sows” and there below was the greatest witness as to who was the God of fertility? Who had supplied Israel’s food in the past? Who was responsible for seasons, the sunshine and the rain, summer and winter? This was to be the contest of Carmel! From the Mediterranean Sea in the north-west, immediately under Carmel, the valley of Jezreel opened up and ran its south-easterly course for about 25 miles towards the Jordan valley; its widest span is about 20 miles, being hedged in to the north by the ring of the mountains of Galilee and in the south by the hills of Samaria. In this broad fertile valley the waving corn of Israel’s fertility was to be seen from season to season as an indication of Yahweh’s blessing upon the nation. Truly if Israel remained faithful to their God there never would be a question as to whether God would sow (See Hos.2:20-22).



MONUMENT ON MT. CARMEL – Traditional Site of Elijah’s Contest with the priests of Baal

“the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred” - By comparing v22 and v40, it appears that the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal accepted the invitation of Elijah but the four hundred prophets of the groves did not. Perhaps it was that the four hundred prophets did not “halt between two opinions” (v21) but had strong commitments to the lewd and sensual

worship of Jezebel. They felt no need to have their position contested.

"which eat at Jezebel's table" - Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was an unholy alliance and produced a divided household. They too conducted separate worships as we can see from reference to 2 Kings 3:13. Eating at Jezebel's table would of course be indicative of full agreement with the first principles of her religion.

v21. *"How long halt ye between two opinions"* - The Hebrew word for "opinions" means "to hop" and comes from a root word which is rendered "the top" and seems to refer to the branches of a tree. Young's Literal renders it "leaping on two branches". Thus the figure is one of a bird hopping from branch to branch unable to make up its mind where it finally wants to come to rest. It was Hosea the prophet who likened Israel to a silly dove (Hos.7:11). He must have observed the habits of that bird which never seems to stand still and flies from one place to another. Israel had adopted a vacillating policy when it sought the protection of a foreign power. At one moment it would go to the south to seek the help from Egypt, and then again to the north to intrigue with the Syrians that they might also come to overshadow Israel with their protection. On rare occasions did Israel turn to the true source of their strength, even to Yahweh in the Heavens. If there is one thing that Israel should have learned by their experience it was that Yahweh cannot be served with divided attentions. (Josh.24:19; Matt.6:24).

"If Yahweh be God follow him" - In this expression is the meaning of Elijah's own name. Elijah set forth the conditions of the contest in very simple but powerful terms. As far as the prophet was concerned there would be no misunderstanding on that day as to who was God.

"the people answered him not a word" - What answer could be given to this straightforward yet fair challenge?

20 So A'-hāb sent unto all the children of Is'-rā-ēl, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Cār'-mēl.

21 And E-lī-jāh came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Bā'-āl, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

22 Then said E-lī-jāh unto the people, ^hI, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Bā'-āl's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

23 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:

v22. *"I, even I only, remain"* - Elijah was mistaken in this, yet nonetheless here on Carmel this particular day it certainly was not going to be a contest where human strength would decide the outcome. One man against four hundred and fifty would need Yahweh's help.

v23. *"Let them therefore give us two bullocks"* - A larger animal is chosen as the representative of the multitude. Under the Law of Moses the national sin offering was a bullock (Lev.4:13-15). It is the people who provide the bullocks for both Elijah and the prophets of Baal. It is the people's offering. The question is, whom would they serve?

"cut it in pieces and lay it on wood" - This is the language used in relationship to the burnt offering (see Lev.1:6,9). Each of the separate offerings under the Law of

Moses had its own peculiar lesson to emphasise, and the clear lesson of the burnt offering was dedication. Of all the offerings it was the only one which was totally consumed upon the altar and because of that it was generally styled the "whole burnt offering" (e.g. Psa.51:19). Before they put this particular offering upon the altar the priests were commanded to dissect the animal and to lay it in order upon the altar, the head first, followed by the fat and then the rest of the body (Lev. 1:9). There was a wonderful significance in this order. The head spoke of the intelligence, the mind, which was first to be surrendered to Yahweh. This in turn was followed by the fat which was indicative of our "inner man" which is affected emotionally by the transformation of our mind. Then upon the basis of a transformed mind and a renewed inner man we should then give all our strength to the service of our Creator, symbolised in the burnt offering by the rest of the body. These basic factors of true worship were indeed principal features in the greatest of all the laws as we see from Deut.6:4-5: "Thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might". To the Hebrew the heart was the seat of the intellect rather than the emotions. Therefore these three principles with the heart, the soul and the might were the spiritual equivalents of those material pieces of the animal which were offered upon the altar under the terms of the burnt offering. That this is a true interpretation of the burnt offering is proven by the Lord Jesus Christ's endorsement of such an interpretation as found in Mark 12:32-33. In that place one of the Scribes asked him the question, "which is the first commandment of all", to which the Lord replied in the words just quoted from Deut.6:4-5. The questioner seeing the logic and the sincerity in the Lord's answer was impressed to the extent that he replied that to love the Lord with all the heart, soul and mind "is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices". Significantly Mark goes on to record, "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly (Gk. intelligently), he said unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God". Here is then the Scriptural interpretation of the meaning of the burnt offering. What a powerful lesson then was to be taught to Israel that day. We cannot serve Yahweh in the spirit of dedication unless we do it with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might. It has to be "a whole burnt offering". This was indeed to be a day of proofs. "His servants ye are to whom ye obey" (Rom.6:16).

v24. *"and I will call on the name of Yahweh"* - This is the Memorial Name of the Deity. (Ex.3:15, Hos.12:4-5). It was not simply a test between God and Baalim on this day but also an endorsement of Yahweh's covenant which He had made with His people, and an appeal to the people to return to that covenant whereby they could become manifestations of the God of that covenant.

"the God that answereth by fire" - This was a familiar sign of Yahweh's approval in the acceptance of offerings (see Lev.9:24; 1 Chron.21:26; 2 Chron.7:1). (In all these cases burnt offerings were involved.) Not only was it a familiar sign of Yahweh; Baal was also worshipped as the sun god, the god of light and fire (later to be known as Apollo) and seeing that Israel had now gathered under a cloudless sky (v44) Baal would seem to have a distinct advantage in this contest!

"It is well spoken" - Note the marginal rendition, "The word is good". Yes, the people thought this to be a very good suggestion. Perhaps they thought that Baal

had more than an even chance of winning this contest seeing they were now in conditions of drought and underneath the burning sun in a cloudless sky.

24 And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God ^mthat answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

25 And E-lī'-jāh said unto the prophets of Bā'-āl, 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.

26 And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Bā'-āl from morning even until noon, saying, O Bā'-āl, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they ²leaped upon the altar which was made.

v25. "for ye are many" - This has ever been the case. The false prophets and their followers have always been in the majority. "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matt. 7:13).

v26. "From morning even unto noon" - That is from the rising of the sun until it reached its zenith. Elijah the prophet watched this sickening spectacle until that point of time.

"O Baal, hear us" - This would be an ever-recurring cry. The Lord Jesus Christ condemned the vain repetitions of the heathen (Matt.6:7).

condemned the vain repetitions of the heathen (Matt.6:7).

"they leaped upon the altar" - The Hebrew word here for "leaped" is the same as the word "halt" in v21. They hopped up and down upon the altar, symbolic of the doubts of their false worship.

"which was made" - The Revised Standard Version has, "which they had made", supported by the Companion Bible and Young's Literal. This was a *new* altar, and this religion of Baal coupled with that of Jezebel was a *new* abomination in Israel. Yahweh had warned them years before of the possibility of accepting a new religion. Israel, then feeling entrenched in His Law, would have thought that a complete impossibility (Deut.28:36). There is a great warning in this phrase "which they had made". Today as Christadelphians we are solidly based upon the Statement of Faith. It was drawn up by the Pioneers of our Brotherhood and their writings are but an exposition and expansion of those fundamental principles set out in the Statement. These are the ancient landmarks, the boundary of Christadelphia and as such should never be removed in case our brethren and sisters wander beyond that which is fundamental to the Truth (cp.Pro.23:10). They are the old-fashioned ideas which are wholesome and good in a world where the trend is ever for a change and for that which is frivolous and demoralising. The flesh has ever been impatient of long-established traditions and seeks to change them according to the whims and fancies of the moment. New ideas arising today in the brotherhood on many questions have not proved healthy for the people of God. Many have made ship-wreck of the faith having grown despondent because they cannot see the consistency of teaching which one would expect to see in people purporting to hold the Truth.

v27. "It came to pass at noon" - With the sun directly overhead in a cloudless sky and after a three-and-a-half year drought, Baal would be successful now or he would never be! Elijah had waited patiently. The opportunity had come to show Baal worship for what it really was!

"Elijah mocked them" - The Hebrew word means "to deride"; Young's Literal has "he played upon them". Many have criticised Elijah for such sarcasm, but this biting sarcasm only deepened the people's perception of the stupidity of Baal worship. This expression of righteous scorn towards a stupid and puerile religion could only deepen the shame of those engaged in it. It is not the only place in Scripture where such scorn is heaped upon a false religion in order to impress the people of God with the folly of that religion and the truth of that which Yahweh set before them (Psa.115:4-8; Isa.44:9-20; Jer.10:2-10).

"cry aloud" - Note the margin, "with a loud voice" (Heb.).

"he is talking" - The margin in this case says "to meditate" but the word is used in the sense of conversing. Elijah's suggestion is that they butt in with a loud voice lest Baal fail to hear them!

"He is pursuing" - The only occurrence of this particular word. Literally it means "to withdraw into a private place"; the RSV renders it, "has gone aside". Elijah accuses Baal of the most ungodlike qualities!



*Priests of Baal dancing
and slashing themselves*

"he sleepeth and must be awakened" - What, at noon! "He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps" (Psa.121:4).

27 And it came to pass at noon, that E-li'-jäh mocked them, and said, ¹ 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.

28 And they cried aloud, and ² 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 ³ prophesied ^b until the *time* of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that *there was* neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

v28. *"They cried aloud"* - Goaded into a frenzy these poor fools obey Elijah.

"cut themselves" - Such was the custom accompanying Phoenician worship. One would confess his sins and then flay himself with a knotted whip until the blood flowed out freely. Shades of this religion can be seen in the way in which the Catholics place penances upon those who sin against the traditions of their church. (See Alexander Hislop's "Two Babylons" pages 151-152).

v29. *"midday was past"* - Baal's power begins to decline towards the west.

"they prophesied" - The RSV has "they raved on". Imagine their frantic efforts as the "sun god" sinks out of sight!

"time of the offering of the evening sacrifice" - The Hebrew word for "offering" here is *"olah"* which means "to cause to ascend" and that for the word "sacrifice" is *"minchah"* "portion", "a gift" and is used of the meal offering. We will note the significance of this phrase when we come to v33.

"neither voice nor any to answer, nor any that regarded" - This is a pitiful expression indeed. There was no voice, so there was no answer, for no one was listening to their cries!

CHAPTER 6 - 1 KINGS 18:30-46. THE TRIUMPH ON MOUNT CARMEL

Baal has been given every opportunity to respond to the agonising pleas of his devoted worshippers. Throughout the long day they have presented a farcical drama before the eyes of assembled Israel. In stark contrast Elijah presents a picture of calm assurance, repairing the altar of Yahweh, preparing the burnt offering for the evening sacrifice and saturating the wood and the bullock until the water filled the surrounding trench. They were the deliberate actions of a man of faith, walking in the certainty of old and tried paths. His prayer, too, was addressed to the "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel", to the God of their fathers, thus appealing not only to Yahweh but to the hearts of "the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the Word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name" (v31). The passionate prophet heard his own name sounded unto heaven as thousands of voices echoed, "Yahweh, He is the God; Yahweh, He is the God". The nation was converted, the prophets of Baal slain by Kishon and the exhilarated Elijah sped before Ahab's chariot as the long-awaited rain fell heavily upon the earth. It was a glorious triumph unto the praise of Yahweh's Name and a high point in all the history of the northern kingdom. In the wonder of the moment, however, the emotional prophet had underestimated the strength of queen Jezebel whose fanatical determination was now aroused by the swing in the nation's loyalties.

v30. *"Come near unto me"* - Two things are implied in this request for the people to come near. First of all Elijah wanted to bring the whole nation round about him in order that they may see that there was not deception in what was about to happen, so that the truth of Yahweh's word might be impressed upon them by Yahweh's intervention. Secondly, he wished to bring the nation round about him, for his lifetime's ambition was that he might 'turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and of the children to the fathers'.

30 And E-li'-jäh said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was ^abroken down.

"And he repaired the altar of Yahweh" - This is in direct contrast to what the prophets of Baal did in that they had built a new altar. He restores the old established worship in contrast to Baal's religion which was a

new thing in Israel. Truly Elijah was occupying the position that the Lord Jesus Christ was to occupy when Isaiah the prophet prophesied of him that he was to be "the repairer of the breach" (Isa.58:12). Elijah, in the spirit of Jer.6:16, had sought out "the old paths" which he knew were pleasant to walk in. It is rather interesting to note that the Lord Jesus Christ quoted Jer.6:16 in Matt.11:28-30 where we read part of his comment; "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". True rest from the labours of sin and death could only be found in the old paths of Yahweh, well-trodden and directed always to the central portion of our hope even the Kingdom of God. Along these old paths we travel deviating not to the right hand nor to the left. Elijah did not remove the ancient landmarks by which the people of Israel might know the way that they must go (Prov.22:28). The record says that Elijah "repaired" the altar. In every place where this word is found, it is used in the sense of "to heal", "to be made whole". This nation was riddled with the terminal disease of apostasy and were in desperate need of the healing

balm of Yahweh's word, brought from Gilead by the prophet of that region (Isa. 1:6; Jer.8:22).

"broken down" - Hebrew "to pull down", RSV "thrown down". This altar had obviously been destroyed (cp.19:10, 14).

v31. "Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob" - Moses commanded great stones to be set up at mount Ebal upon which the Law was inscribed that he might teach Israel the principle that unity must be on the basis of truth (Deut.27:2-6). A twelve-stone memorial also stood at the crossing of the Jordan in order that Israel may be reminded that in the strength of unity salvation would be accomplished (Josh.4:1-8). At this time the twelve tribes were divided politically and religiously, yet here is the prophet trying desperately to unite the nation on the basis of Yahweh's covenant. Israel were never truly united and never will be until the Lord Jesus Christ comes when he will unite both tribes upon the mountains of Israel under the headship of one King (Ezek.36:20-22).

"Israel shall be thy name" - The changing of Jacob's name to Israel is recorded for us in Gen.32:24-32. There the man Jacob desperately clung to the angel during the long night in which they wrestled together. Yahweh changed Jacob's name because of his determination to hang on. This incident was seen by Hosea as a message from Yahweh to the whole nation and for all time. "There he spake with us" (Hos.12:4). The great moral lesson of this incident was a determination to turn unto Yahweh the God of Israel and wait upon Him. It is of the greatest significance that the only other place where a similar phrase is found (noting the fact that Israel's name was changed) is in 2 Kings 17:34. Here the context speaks of the carrying away of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom (to whom Elijah came) when they had reached the zenith of their apostasy. Those who were left in the land, who became mingled with the heathen settling among them, became also mixed up in their religion, as it is stated in v33; "They feared Yahweh and served their own gods!" What a significant context to find those words concerning the changing of Jacob's name to Israel when it is compared with this incident on the top of Carmel where they halted between two opinions. We see the principle of the changing of that name is that those who would be "princes with God" must be determined to serve Him. "Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually" (Hos.12:6). Thus the very expression used here is a clear indication of Elijah's motive as with great determination he endeavoured to get these people to serve Yahweh with all their heart and all their soul and with all their might. (Deut. 6:4).

31 And E-li'-jäh took ^b twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jä'-cob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, 'İs'-rā-ël shall be thy name:

32 And with the ^f stones he ^s 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.

v32. "two measures of seed" - Hebrew word here is "seah", "a third of an ephah". The sense of this measure was that there would be sufficient to sow a parcel of ground. Beneath them lay the valley of Jezreel, signifying "God sows". cp. Jer.31:27-28, where, speaking of the days when Israel will truly accept the new covenant, Yahweh

says; "I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah."

v33. "*Put the wood in order*" - Another expression from Lev.1:7 speaking of the burnt offering.

"*Fill four barrels*" - This being done three times (see v34), in all twelve barrels of water were involved. Again it would seem that the twelve tribes of Israel are in view here, that, as the water would saturate the sacrifice, so Elijah would hope that Israel would become completely identified with the burnt offering, to Yahweh's glory. Many have pondered the fact of water being available here after 42 months of intense drought. It could not be determined with any certainty as to where the water came from. Some suggestions are that the water came from the sea, others suggest that there was a perennial spring here which, even under extreme conditions of drought, had not dried up. The latter suggestion is made by the historian Josephus.

"*pour it on the burnt sacrifice*" - The saturation with water would be a real test for the God that would answer by fire (see Jud.6:20).

v36. "*time of the offering of the evening sacrifice*" - The Law specified the offering of two lambs as the burnt offerings, one in the morning and the other in the evening; because of the offering being consumed all day and all night it was known under the Law as "the continual burnt offering" (Num.28:4). As the smoke of the burnt offering spiralled its way to heaven as "a sweet smelling savour" so it also became identified with the incense which was offered in the Holy Place (Ex.30:7-8). This incense itself became a very apt symbol of the prayers which are wafted sweetly into the nostrils of Yahweh in Heaven (Psa.141:2). This time of the evening, as the sun was sinking in the west (which to Israel signified a new day rather than the end of the present one) became the traditional time of prayer for Israel (see Ezra 9:4-5; Dan.9:21); a practice which continued into New Testament times (Matt.14:23; Acts 3:1). Thus it was that Elijah, by enacting a very old tradition, not only intended to lead the people in prayer to Yahweh and thereby turn their heart back again, but was teaching them that the way to do this was to become immersed in the old traditions and ways which Yahweh had established from time everlasting.

"*LORD God of Abraham Isaac and Israel*" - Elijah's prayer was "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man" and was the essence of simplicity and sincerity (James 5:16). He addressed Yahweh with the covenant title associated with the progenitors of the nation (see Ex.3:15; 4:2-3). In no better way could he bring the nation's attention to the *foundations of their religion* than to direct them to the three great men of faith with whom the promises had been made. These promises which had laid the foundation for the coming Kingdom, were also a guarantee of Israel's perpetual existence, memorialising Yahweh's purpose vouchsafed unto the fathers (Psa.105:6-11). The Lord Jesus Christ also directed his contemporaries to these three great names of faith as foundation members of the new Israel because of their faith in the promises (Luke 13:28; 20:37, cf. Heb.11:16).

"*thou art God in Israel*" - Though filling the universe as the Creator of heaven and earth, Yahweh is nonetheless to be found in Israel. There He has localised Himself

33 And he ¹put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid *him* on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and ²pour 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 round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

36 And it came to pass at *the time* of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that E-l-i-jah the prophet came near, and said, LORD ³"God of A-brā-hām, I'-śāac, and of Īs'-rā-ēl, ⁴let it be known this day that thou art God in Īs'-rā-ēl, and that I am thy servant, and that ⁵I have done all these things at thy word.

in order that men in their search for Him may find Him. The same purpose was served in the slaying of Goliath as David directed the whole world's attention to the fact that God was indeed in Israel (1 Sam.17:46). Naaman the Syrian, also, in his search for God and for cleansing when he came to Elisha the prophet, learned precisely the same lesson (2 Kings 5:15). Many years later another Gentile, this time a woman in an immoral condition, having come to the Lord at the well of Samaria and placed her questions in respect to which religion was correct, was told forcibly that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

"I am thy servant" - Elijah was a mere slave.

the real power was of Yahweh, yet he nonetheless wanted the people to see that he was identified with his Master in the Heavens.

v37. *"thou hast turned their heart back again"* - Such was the purpose of his prayer. Elijah was simply not interested in the manifestation of divine power to prove that God was God. His faith was such that he took this for granted. When God reveals Himself with such power it is always for the express purpose that His Name may be recorded in the minds of men and women; that they understand that the promises made in His Name are indeed the way to eternal life. Israel had left Egypt by the hand of Moses but had "turned back in their hearts again into Egypt" and so they had ever remained (Acts 7:39). Elijah was to turn them again with their eyes truly towards the Promised Land and the glory to be revealed. In fact he never completed this work. So Malachi states emphatically that Elijah will re-appear to fulfil his mission - the conversion of Israel (Mal.4:5-6). The expression "he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers" indicates Elijah's desire to bring the sons of Abraham according to the flesh to be the sons of Abraham according to the spirit, that is, to become related to Abraham through his faith in the promises made (see John 8:39). There is an interesting interpretation of Malachi's words in Luke 1:17 where the angel Gabriel, speaking of the Spirit and power of Elijah, expresses his mission this way, "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". Abraham is the father of those who are justified by faith (Rom.4:11-13) and his heart will be towards his natural children when those disobedient children have learned the righteousness of faith, as manifest in Jesus Christ, and have ceased to go about establishing their own righteousness (Rom.10:1-4).

v37. *"the fire of Yahweh fell"* - Miraculously, divine fire burned downwards consuming the sacrifice, wood, stones, dust and water in that order. This could only be done by divine power.

v39. *"Yahweh, he is the God"* - What a wonderful thrill to the prophet to hear

the voice of the nation raised in acclaim to the great King In Heaven with an expression which was the very interpretation of Elijah's name, "Yahweh is my God!"

37 ^aHear 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.

38 ^rThen the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed ^sthe burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench.

39 And when all the people saw it, they ^xfell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.

40 And E-li'-jah said unto them, Take the prophets of Bā'-āl; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and E-li'-jah brought them down to the brook ^aKī'-shōn, and ^cslew them there.

v40. "Take" - Hebrew, "to seize", "to lay hold"; margin = "apprehend".

"let not one of them escape" - Elijah was determined upon the complete extermination of the false prophets according to the Law of Moses as set out in Deut.13:1-11; 17:2-7. This stringent rule will be reinforced in the age to come when the world will be rid of all such false prophets (Zech.13:3).

"brook Kishon" - The Hebrew word means "winding" and it was the scene of the victory of Barak over Sisera (Jud.4:7). The

brook ran right under the eastern end of the Carmel range, about 1,000 ft. below on the floor of the valley of Jezreel.

v41. "Get thee up, eat and drink" - Elijah possibly brought the king back to the altar which he had prepared upon Mt. Carmel and there invited him to eat in a fellowship meal to seal the covenant after the manner in which Moses ate with Jethro his father-in-law (Ex.18:12). The barrier had now been removed through the death of the false prophets and Elijah invited the king to fellowship on the basis of truth.

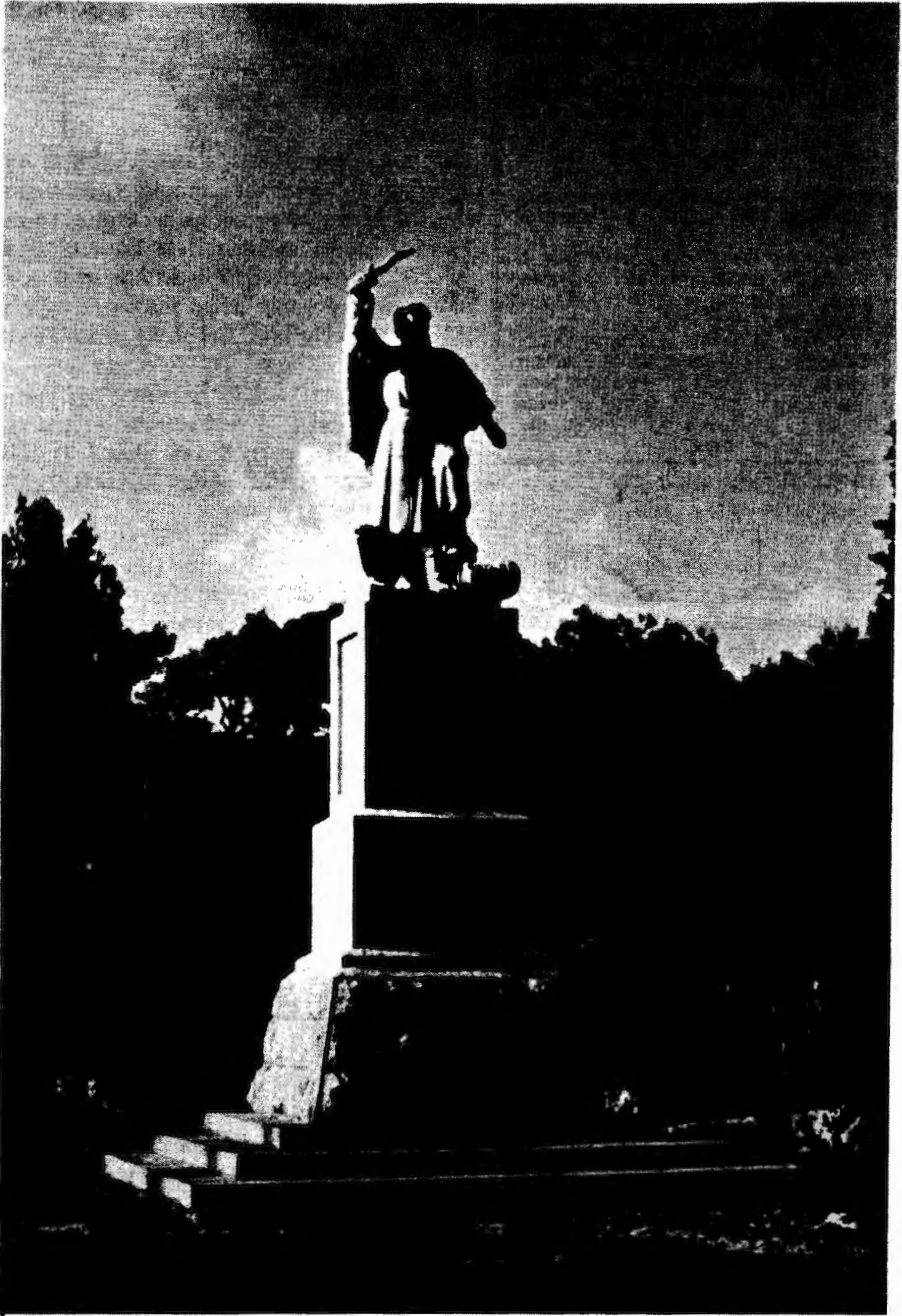
"A sound of abundance of rain" - Evidently no one else could hear this wonderful sound. There was still no visible sign of rain and the sky was still without a cloud (see v43). Elijah knew that the rain would come as he had said, "according to my word" (17:1). Yahweh was determined that with the coming of the rain the people would see and understand that he was identified with the blessings of heaven, and in this way the sound of the rain was in his ears when all Israel were still bewildered as to where it was to come from. What a dramatic and exciting time for the prophet, the king and for all the people of Israel!

v42. "Elijah went up to the top of Carmel" - Here would be the most densely forested part of the mountain, a place for hiding (Amos 9:3) and the withering of which would be indicative of extreme drought (Amos 1:2).

"cast himself down" - The unusual word used here is also used in 2 Kings 4:34-35. It means "to prostrate oneself" in the sense of the forehead touching the ground. What a picture of humility and a wonderful contrast to the mad frenzy of the egoistical display put on by the prophets of Baal.

"and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees" - An unusual posture indicating the intensity of his sincerity and humility. This was indeed the 'effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man' (James 5:16).

v43. "Go again seven times" - It seems rather unusual that Yahweh required Eli-



SCULPTURE ON MT. CARMEL COMMEMORATING THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL BY ELIJAH.

41 ¶ And Ē-Ī-jāh said unto Ā'hāb, Get thee up, eat and drink; for *there is a sound of abundance of rain.*

42 So Ā'hāb went up to eat and to drink. And Ē-Ī-jāh went up to the top of Cār-mēl; and he ^a 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 ^c seven times.

jah to serve Him in this way before rain would be sent. However, Yahweh can make it rain under any conditions and whether men pray to Him or not. The point being made here was not only Elijah's identification with the rain that was coming, but the need for such men as he to give themselves in *complete dedication* if they were to be the channel of divine manifestation to help others to see the way of truth. Seven was

clearly the number of the covenant (see Lev.26:15, 18, 21, 24, 28). Israel was given the sabbath on the seventh day in order to remind them that their covenant with God deserved their time as they meditated upon the privileges of a Covenant people (Ex.31:16-17). The seventh day was also typical of the seventh millenium when God will send us His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that there may be a sabbath of rest for the people of God (Heb.4:9). At that time there will be a complete end to the spiritual drought now gripping Israel and all the nations (Amos 8:11-14; Joel 2:23).

v44. "like a man's hand" - The Hebrew word here is "kaph" literally "the hollow of the hand"; Youngs Literal has "the palm of a man". The psalmist said "Thou openest Thy hand they are filled with good" (Psa.104:28; 145:16). Perhaps what Elijah's servants saw was this cloud in the shape of a man's hand with the concavity of the hand downward, indicative of the fact that Yahweh was about to open His hand and pour blessings upon the face of the earth. From the Lord's reference to



Servant of Elijah sees a small cloud in the distance.

this incident in Luke 12:54, it is clear that there was more in this historic narrative than Israel allowed!

“prepare thy chariot” - Hebrew “to yoke”, “to harness”.

v45. *“And it came to pass in the meanwhile”* - The Hebrew word for “meanwhile” has the sense of ‘immediately’, and we understand from this that it was not the brewing of a normal storm that they were witnessing but that the heavens were miraculously filled with dark, ominous-looking clouds almost as if the prayer of Elijah had suddenly inflated them. In this way the miracle of rain brought by the presence, dedication and faith of Elijah was seen to be far more than a natural phenomenon.

“was a great rain” - The present was but a foretaste of the future when Yahweh will open “the river of God” and pour water upon a thirsty earth (Psa.65:9-13). For three-and-a-half years the earth had baked beneath the sun, and now cracked and parched it looked anything but “the Glory of all lands” (Ezek.20:6). Sweeping in over the sea, the man’s hand pointed the way for the water-laden clouds that followed. Elijah the prophet sped before the chariot-borne king, the noise of the deluge loud and beautiful in his ears. Sheets of water cascaded out of the sky, and Kishon was washed of the blood of Baal’s prophets and filled to overflowing with the water of life. Israel’s wheatbowl hardened by drought to resist plough and seed, softened beneath heaven’s penetrating influence.

Loins lifted, feet shod with the wings of exhilaration, shaggy mane streaming in the wind, the gaunt, yet glorious prophet of God, headed off toward Jezreel ... “GOD SOWS”. Now, if never before, Israel would respond, must respond. The time had come to “break up the fallow ground: for it was time to seek Yahweh till he come and rain righteousness upon you” (Hosea 10:12).

44 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. And he said, Go up, say unto Á’háb, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee 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 Á’háb rode, and went to Jéz-réel.

46 And the hand of the LORD was on E-li’-jáh; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Á’háb to the entrance of Jéz-réel.

“Jezreel” - Jezebel seems to have made this the royal residence where she and Ahab lived together in great pomp and ceremony (1 Kings 21:1). It was a city of great natural beauty situated at the eastern end of the valley of Jezreel from whence it took its name. Hosea the prophet speaks of “the day of Jezreel” with the nation unified under one leader as a result of which they will again be the subject of “God’s sowing” and great fertility and prosperity will result (Hosea 1:10-11; 2:23).

v46. *“the hand of Yahweh was on Elijah”* - This would be absolutely necessary to sustain the prophet in his long distance run of nearly 18 miles.

“girded up his loins” - Here it indicates a practical necessity but the phrase is used as a symbol of readiness (Ex.12:11; Luke 12:35) and of action (2 Kings 4:29). As

followers of the Lord Jesus Christ we have to "gird up the loins of our mind" (1 Pet.1:13). And in order to keep the Truth uppermost in our minds we are told by the apostle to have our "loins gird about with truth" (Eph.6:14).

"ran before Ahab" - Many feel that Elijah raced before Ahab in order that he might show that on that particular day that the power of Yahweh had been exercised not on behalf of the king but through the faith of Elijah. In this way they see the racing of Elijah before the chariot of Ahab as a clear indication of Elijah's superiority. But such a concept is not in conformity with the customs of the times. The Eastern custom of running before a chariot was in order that the person running may show that the one in the chariot was clearly the superior (see 1 Sam.8:11; 2 Sam.15:1; 1 Kings 1:5). Here was a wonderful illustration of Elijah's true humility. Though he had led the nation in a spiritual revival when the king had been leading them in the opposite direction yet, believing Ahab had now been converted and was the head of the covenant people, Elijah ran before in deference to the king. This was true humility, showing that the king was indeed, on that day, the royal majesty of Israel.

"the entrance of Jezreel" - Note he did not enter into the city for only "they which are gorgeously apparalled are in king's palaces" (Luke 7:25). Again the measure of humility is seen.

CHAPTER 7 - 1 KINGS 19:1-18

THE STILL SMALL VOICE

All Elijah's hopes were dashed against the gates of Jezreel. Truly the day will come when Yahweh "will sow the House of Israel and the House of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of Beast" (Jer.31:22), when he makes "a new covenant with the House of Israel" (v31). That day had not yet arrived. Within the walls of the city was a heart so hardened in sin as to make it impenetrable to the seed of the Truth. Hearts softened by the Truth, dried up beneath her scorching tongue. This was especially true of her husband. Elijah soon found, as did John some years later, that peace would elude Israel as long as the whoredoms of Jezebel were above the ground (2 Kings 9:22).

v1. "how he had slain all the prophets with the sword" - Here is a revelation of the vacillating and weak character of the king, especially as he stood before his wife Jezebel. He does not designate them as "the prophets of Baal" apparently dropping the title in order to indicate before Jezebel, his identification with them. To say that Elijah had slain "the prophets of Baal" would be to open the question as to whether he agreed with that slaying or not. But now having called them merely "the prophets" the king was identifying himself clearly with those prophets before the one whom he knew would be pleased with such an identification. Still not convinced by events on Carmel, the king of Israel halted between two opinions!

AND Ā'-hāb told "Jēz'-ē-bēl all that *Ē-lī'-jāh had done, and withal how ^y he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

2 Then Jēz'-ē-bēl sent a messenger unto Ē-lī'-jāh, 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 to morrow about this time.

3 And when he saw *that*, he arose, and went for his life, and came to *Bēer-shē'-bā, which *belongeth* to Jū'-dāh, and left his servant there.

v2. "Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah" - It is just as well that Elijah paused at the gate of Jezreel for he could scarcely have believed the reaction of the king once he had faced Jezebel inside the city. The fact that Jezebel reacted so swiftly and so violently to the message of Ahab indicates not only her ruthless determination but also her raw courage as she prepares to defy the mighty prophet. She was indeed a very strong and wil-

ful woman.

v3. "when he saw" - It seems a strange reaction from the prophet to run from the threat of this woman after he had so courageously faced the whole nation, including the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal in the open country of mount Carmel. However, men of strong and passionate natures are liable to a reaction of an opposite sort, especially when their life's ambitions and hopes seem to be dashed before them, despite the good they have done. Therefore, men like Elijah, who can express themselves so passionately on behalf of the Creator are also subject oftentimes to very great depression. Despair sometimes marches very close on the heels of exaltation and overtakes even the greatest of men; for example, Moses (Ex.33:12) and John the Baptist (Matt.11:2-3). "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are ..." (James 5:17).

"arose and went for his life" - Some manuscripts have here "he was afraid and he arose" (RSV). Afraid though he was, later on another reason emerges as to why he fled, as he sat under his juniper tree; there he despondently expresses himself as though he felt his life's work had been an abject failure.

"to Beersheba" - Beersheba marked the southern extremity of Judah's border. Elijah's flight began in the north and had taken him right through the territory of Judah, where he never afforded himself rest until he had reached the southern extremity of that kingdom. Maybe he felt that even in Judah he would not be welcome now, and that he could be apprehended there on behalf of Jezebel, seeing that Jehoshaphat was in alliance with Ahab (2 Chron.18:1) and had married his son, Jehoram, to the daughter of Jezebel, Athaliah (2 Chron.21:5-6).

v4. *"but he himself went a day's journey"* - Still heading south through inhospitable terrain, Elijah was moving inexorably to the great mountain of God, even Horeb itself. There was an irresistible pull bringing the prophet of Gilead to that stern and bleak region of Sinai, where years before the Law had sounded out amidst scenes of great terror. We must take note at this stage that Elijah, on this occasion, travelled nearly 200 miles from the place where he had left Ahab right down to the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula. This is the only time in the record of his life that he moves other than by the command of "the word of Yahweh". This journey was on behalf of himself and yet it was to result in the greatest education of his life!

"a juniper tree" - This was a small tree reaching to a height of about 7 or 8 feet and which grew prolifically in the Sinai desert. It was of the broom family, grew



A JUNIPER BRANCH

little white flowers and was able to exist on very slight moisture. The Hebrew word means "to yoke up" or "to bind". It has been said that many weary travellers have saved their lives by eating the roots of this small tree. Although the roots are nauseous and bitter they can be used for food, and in times of extreme drought have been known to sustain the traveller reduced to the point of death. The use of this tree in these circumstances is noted in Job 30:4, the context of which makes very interesting reading in relation to Elijah and his problems at this present moment of time. The roots of the tree provided more than just food. They could be burnt and rendered down to coals which could be used again; they would rekindle quickly and give off quite a deal of heat (Psa.120:4). Again the context of this verse of Scripture could well fit the circumstances of Elijah in his contest with Jezebel!

4 ¶ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a ^{3f} juniper tree: and he ^s requested for himself that he might die; and 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 ^h an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise *and* eat.

"for I am not better than my fathers" - Here the prophet gives vent to his bitter frustration and reveals a complete depression in which he saw his whole life as being an utter failure. He had failed to realise that Yahweh moves in our lives to execute His own purpose. The repeated emphasis on the personal pronoun "I" indicated Elijah's thoughts were inward, that he was filled with self-pity and failed to realise the purpose of God

in his life. Note the use of "I" in 18:22; 19:10, 14. "The fathers" in question here seem to have been the generation who had wandered in this particular wilderness hopelessly for 38 years and perished for their lack of faith (Num.14). Elijah does himself a great injustice by allying himself to that particular generation!

v5. *"an angel touched him"* - Elijah worked in the period styled by Hosea "the ministry of the prophets" (Hos.12:10). This was an era when the prophets were the means of divine manifestation to the nation and consequently angelic appearances were rare and unnecessary. Angels appeared in the capacity of "messengers", which is the meaning of their name, and in the ministry of the prophets their duties ought to have been done by those prophets appointed for the purpose. What a lesson for Elijah in the appearance of an angel.

6 And he looked, and, behold, *there was* ^{1a} a cake baken on the ⁴ 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 thee.

v6. *"a cake baken on the coals and a cruse of water"* - Even in the material sense angels proved to Elijah to have been "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

"laid him down again" - Such was the depth of his despair that having been awakened by an angel and fed, yet he immediately fell back into a deep sleep.

v7. *"again the second time"* - There was a great lesson to be seen in this fact; even

the great prophet needed to be fed twice! Yet he himself expected other people to respond at once. Yahweh was teaching him here the need for patience and for application in order that people may be gently and consistently persuaded to the greater things of the Truth.



Elijah awakening to find food left by an angel

"because the journey is too great for thee" - This is an illuminating statement! The angel knows his destination, and the reason for it, and reminds Elijah of his own limitations! Not only so but the angel seems to also indicate in these words that he wants the prophet to complete his journey for there God is waiting for him, and also for him there is waiting a very great lesson!

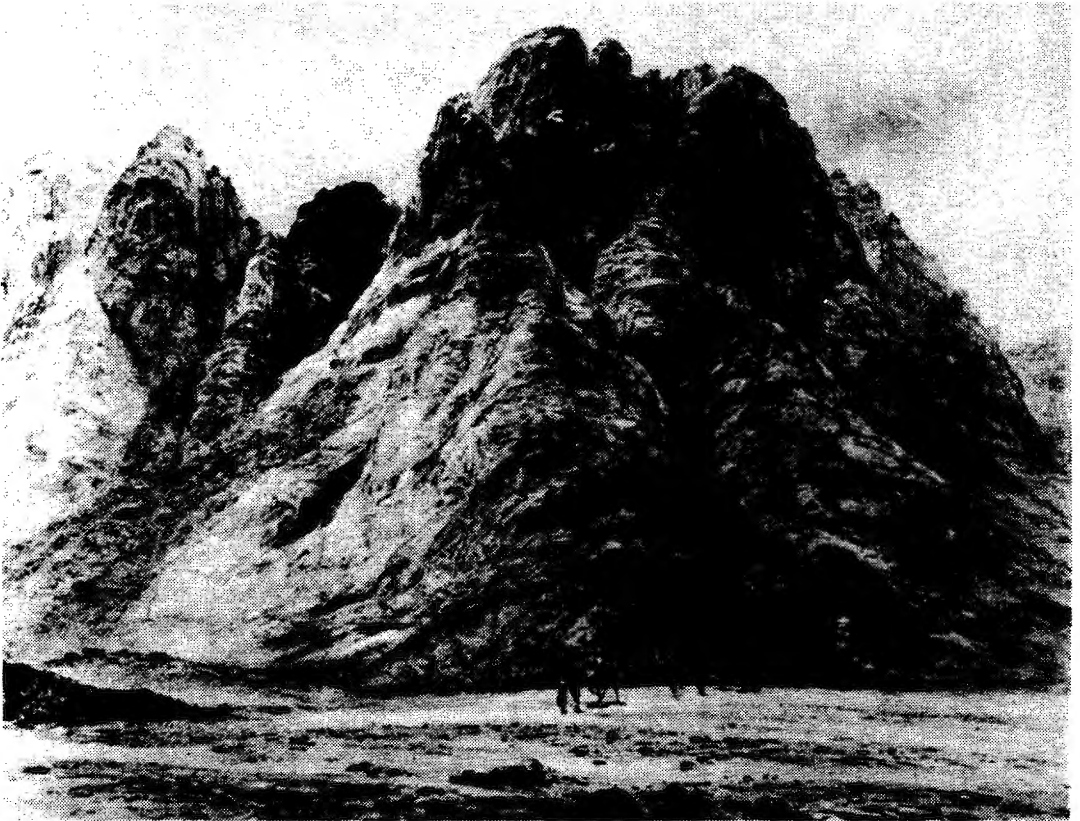
8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat ^b forty days and forty nights unto ^c Hôr-^{ēb} the ^d mount of God.

9 ¶ And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Ē-lī'-jāh?

v8. *"in the strength of that meat"* - Like Moses of old he experienced a forty-day fast before he was brought face to face with his Creator (Deut.9:9). Both prophets were to learn the lesson that "man does not live by bread alone" (Deut.8:3). Yet for all this, great as they were, both men failed; a greater than they was also to fast for forty days and to learn that lesson as they had never learned it (Matt.4:2).

"forty days and forty nights" - The number 40 is consistently used in the sense of probation and trial. His experiences in this particular wilderness would help him to appreciate the probation of Israel when they were brought out of Egypt and spent 40 years in the wilderness of Sin. Elijah is yet to be called out of the grave that he in turn may call Israel out of their political grave in which they now lay among the nations. He will bring them into other regions as well as into this self-same region in which he is now found; his experiences here will have fitted him for the second exodus of which he is to be the leader (see Micah 7:15).

"Horeb" - Hebrew word means "desolate" from a root "to kill by thirst"; this is exactly what Yahweh had done through the drought. Here the Law had been given in scenes of abject terror (Deut.4:1-12; cp. Heb.12:18-21.) After Elijah's education in the spirit of the Law, at the very location of its origin, how significant it is that Malachi links his future work with the Law given here at Horeb (Mal.4:4-6).



HOREB

v9. *"and he came hither unto a cave"* - In the Hebrew it has the definite article here, *"the cave"*. In the circumstances which followed there are suggestions that this could well have been the cave where Moses was hid in the cleft of a rock when the glory of Yahweh passed by him (Ex.33:22).

"the word of Yahweh" - Having arrived at his destination *"the word of Yahweh"* demands an explanation of his presence! Later the same question will come, and though the question emanates from the same source the *"voice"* is in a different tone!

"What doest thou here Elijah?" - Having arrived at his destination, this pertinent question is addressed to the prophet. There is no doubt that in this question the emphasis is on the word *"here"*. It is as if Yahweh were saying to him, *"What is your impression of My character and of My aims that brings you to this particular spot, Elijah?"*

v10. *"Yahweh Elohim of hosts"* - This is the first use of this full title apart from its use in the narrative of 2 Sam.5:10. It is the first use of the title in the mouth of an individual. Its use by Elijah is a revelation of what was going on in his mind. *"Yahweh Elohim"* is the title of the God of the covenant. Linked as it is here with *"Sabaoth"* (*"armies"*), it indicates that Elijah felt in his mind that under the circumstances prevailing in Israel, Yahweh should establish His covenant by force! However, such has never been and could never be the method which the Creator adopts that men and women might accept His covenant. The setting forth of the new covenant, enunciated as it had been years previous to Abraham, and sealed in the blood of His only begotten Son, was an exhibition of God's love and mercy towards mankind. As such, it was calculated to provoke a response in love, that they may voluntarily accept the terms of that covenant and give themselves to the will of the Creator. For this reason the covenant was designed that it might reflect not only glory to the Creator, but also give Him pleasure in the response of His creatures. Yahweh's intention through His covenant is precisely the opposite of that which Elijah imagined should have been His intention with wayward Israel. The time will come, says Yahweh, *"when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah."* In so doing He will write it upon their hearts (Jer. 31:33).

10 And he said, I have been very
 ¶jealous for ^hthe LORD God of
 hosts: for the children of Ís'-rā-
 ēl have ⁱforsaken thy covenant,
^hthrown down thine altars, and
^mslain thy prophets with the sword;
 and ⁿI, even I only, am left; and
 they seek my life, to take it away.

"the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant" - Here again was proof of Elijah's misunderstanding of God's purpose with Israel. It was Paul who put his finger on the basic misunderstanding in Elijah's mind at this point of history. In a chapter dealing with the fact that God would never forsake His people, he says of Elijah: *"he maketh intercession to God against Israel"* (Rom. 11:1-2).

If it was, as suggested above, the very cave where Moses stood on Sinai to pray to God, then what a tremendous contrast we have here in Elijah; for in this particular

place Moses interceded very passionately *on behalf of Israel* (Ex.34:8-9).

"I, even I only" - Again a further indication of Elijah's misunderstanding of the purpose of God. The sense of this phrase in this place seems to be "if I go the cause is lost because I am the only prophet left and it all depends on me". Elijah, in his bitter frustration and despondency is not thinking clearly. Only a few weeks earlier he had requested for himself that he might die (v4).

v11. *"Go forth"* - The Hebrew expression is "go forth tomorrow". Yahweh gave him a night to think over what he had said and to stand in readiness for the divine answer.



Elijah standing at the mouth of the cave while the storm rages

"stand upon the mount" - So also Moses was told (Ex.33:21). It was on that occasion (when Moses stood in this place, that he had been so wonderfully impressed with the character of Yahweh) when he requested that God might show him "His way" (Ex.33:13) and had the divine character revealed to him (Ex.34:5-8). It was the faithless people who (on this occasion) were more overcome by the manifestation of physical power than by the exhibition of divine characteristics (Ex.19:6-18). The pointed contrast between them and their leader Moses is made in Psa. 103:7. The people had been impressed with God's *acts* but Moses with His *ways*. Similarly Elijah is now about to be impressed with God's acts. Yet over and above that, the still small voice was to show him that the greatest power in the universe is

the impressive power of the divine character.

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 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:

“strong wind” - The earthquake, the fire and the wind were terrible manifestations of power and very destructive. These manifestations of divine power would have driven the prophet back into the recesses of his dark cave as the mountains reverberated with the smashing of the great rocks. The quaking of the mountain under his feet and the scorching heat of the fire would certainly leave a

vivid impression upon the prophet's mind of the tremendous power available to the Creator with which He could, if He had wished, have done all that Elijah asked for in the destruction of Israel. The time will come when Yahweh will be manifest in such powers (see Psa.18:6-14). But that was not to be immediately, as he imagined. There is another work to be done before these physical manifestations of power are unleashed upon the earth.

v11. *“Yahweh was not in the earthquake”* - Yahweh's purpose to change men and women from the image of the earthy to the image of the heavenly reflecting His own attributes, will not be done by force and could not be done by force. It is a matter, as expressed by the prophet, “not by might, not by power, but by my spirit” (Zech.4:6).

v12. *“still small voice”* - The Hebrew equivalent for the word “still” is “calm”, “silence”; for the word “small”; “crushed” i.e. “small” or “thin”. Rotherham has, “the voice of a gentle whisper”; the Septuagint version, “a gentle breeze”. Here was a power not yet exercised by Elijah which could possibly save many in Israel from the destruction that he now prayed might be brought upon them. That power lies in the persuasive and insistent voice of Yahweh (Isa.42:1-3). Yet in that same chapter the day will come when Yahweh's voice will have to be raised up on high like the roaring of a lion (cp. Isa.42:13-14).

James, the brother of the Lord, speaks of the attributes of divine wisdom and describes some of them in chapter three verse seventeen where the words “easy to be entreated” are better understood from the Greek as, “winning its way by persuasiveness”. Indeed this has ever been the method that God has used for the bringing of His servants to the appreciation of His greatness (see Rom.2:4). The man chosen to take the gospel message to the Gentile world, the greatest man ever to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, followed the example also of his Heavenly Father in the application of the principles of the still small voice (see 2 Cor.5:14; 10:1-2).

v13. *“wrapped his face in his mantle”* - This mantle of Elijah's was a symbol of his prophetic office. This was clearly understood to be the case when Elisha picked it up after it had dropped from Elijah's presence on the banks of the river Jordan and, dividing the river with it, was then seen to be Elijah's successor, possessing his mantle (2 Kings 2:13, 15). Again, in Zech.13:4, we see that the mantle was a sym-

bol of the prophetic office. The fact that the prophet buried his face in this mantle speaks of his deep humility as he begins to realise the power of the still small voice above the physical manifestations of power which he had desired.

12 And after the earthquake a^b fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire^{2c} a still small voice.

13 And it was so, when Ê-lî'-jäh heard it, that^d 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 doest thou here, Ê-lî'-jäh?

"and went out" - It was the power of the still small voice that drew him out of his seclusion. It was the physical manifestations of terror that accompanied the giving of the Law that caused Israel to back away from their God (Deut.5:22-27).

"a voice unto him" - Rotherham translates this "lo, unto him a voice" which is sup-

ported by Young's Literal translation. On the first occasion when this pertinent question was posed to the prophet, we note that it was by "the word of Yahweh" (see v9). It was that Word that had propelled him like a chariot through Israel (see 17:2, 8; 18:1). Now a new phase of his ministry opens up and Elijah is to be sent back on his way to exercise the persuasive insistence of the "still small voice" to save Israel from the very destruction which he had prayed may come upon them! Although in the subsequent history nothing is said as to whether Elijah applied the power of "the still small voice", it would seem that his education into the spirit of the Law was to fit him for a work much more distant in the future. Against the background of Elijah's visit to Sinai read again the prophecy of Malachi 4:4-6, "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, WHICH I COMMANDED UNTO HIM IN HOREB for all Israel with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet BEFORE the coming of the great and dreadful day of YAHWEH. 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." Truly Yahweh's ways are as high above ours as the heaven is above the earth. The rugged prophet from Gilead, mellowed by his experience, is to return before Yahweh's anger flashes forth, to prevent Israel suffering the very curse which he had sought to bring upon them.

"What doest thou here Elijah" - Again this pertinent question. How loud this would have sounded in the ears of Elijah as it was whispered by the still small voice of the Spirit of Yahweh!

v14. "I have been very jealous" - The fact that Elijah now repeats his answer word for word indicates that he had come down to this place with a prepared statement. Though the prophet stuck to his prepared statement, one can well and truly imagine that it would not have been said with as great a conviction as it was said in the first instance. Subsequent events reveal that Elijah had not yet fully absorbed the lesson which he had learned here at Horeb. Other factors in his life had to contribute to the perfecting of this lesson.

v15. "Go return on thy way" - Rotherham has "to thy way". Here was a solid rebuke to the prophet. He had wandered out of his way and now must return to the work of the Creator.

14 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Īś-rā-ēl 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.

15 And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Dā-mās'-cūs: and when thou comest, ^aanoint ^bHā-zā'-ēl to be king over Sūr'-i-ā:

“to the wilderness of Damascus” - The Revised Version margin has “by the wilderness to Damascus”

“anoint Hazael” - None of the men mentioned in this list were actually anointed by Elijah. However Elijah was involved in the circumstances of the call of Elisha and so was responsible for the declaration of the kingship of Hazael through the lips of that prophet (2 Kings 8:7-15). Similarly he was

involved in the anointing of Jehu even though it was performed by one of the servants at Elisha's request (2 Kings 8:7-15; 9:1-10).

Divine mercy is not inconsistent with divine judgment. Elijah believed this but did not appreciate that Yahweh will also preserve the faithful in times of trial and do all in His power to extricate those who want to be helped before that judgment falls. However, in order that Elijah would not misunderstand the character of the Creator, He spells out very clearly in these verses that He will “by no means clear the guilty” and had in fact raised up certain men to perform the judgment that Elijah had so earnestly sought upon this wicked and perverse generation. But that judgment was not the work that Yahweh had marked out for Elijah; his work was not to destroy men's lives but to save them (Luke 9:56). In the list of names of those who would succeed him and who would execute divine judgment, there is a story which spells out clearly Yahweh's attitude to wickedness. He was not indifferent to the evil being committed in the nation. “Hazael” means “God has seen”; “Jehu”, “Yahweh is he”; “Nimshi”, “to pull out”; “Elisha”, “the salvation of God” and “Shaphat”, “judgment”. Not all lists of names have a story to tell from their combined meanings, but it would be difficult to imagine that this is not the case when we look at the names here in question, for, putting these names together, we get this sentence: “God has heard, Yahweh is He, and He will pull out, by the salvation of God, before the judgment falls upon Israel”.

v16. “prophet in thy room” - This would be quite a surprise for Elijah who had said “I only am left!”

16 And ^mJē'-hū the son of Nīm'-shī shalt thou anoint to be king over Īś-rā-ēl: and ⁿE-lī'-shā the son of Shā'-phāt of A'-bēl-mē-hō'-lāh shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.

17 And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth ^athe sword of Hā-zā'-ēl ^bshall Jē'-hū slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jē'-hū shall E-lī'-shā slay.

v17. “the sword of Hazael” - Such would be the cruelty of Hazael to the children of Israel when he stormed into the land to execute judgment, that even the prior consideration of it moved the prophet Elisha to tears! (2 Kings 8:7-15) By the time that Hazael had come to the throne, Israel's apostasy had grown to fulness and Yahweh began to “cut them short” by the sword of this oppressive Syrian king (2 Kings 10:32).

He made Israel like the dust of the threshing-floor (2 Kings 13:3-7 - “made them like the dust at threshing” RSV).

"shall Jehu slay" - Jehu was the fearful scourge of the house of Ahab that Yahweh raised up to bring that iniquitous dynasty to a blood-spattered end. Through his marriage with that accursed woman, Jezebel, Ahab had raised up children to continue his household who in turn, were to perpetuate the iniquity that they were taught by their mother and father. In dealing with the antitypical Jezebel and her influence in the Thyatira ecclesia, the Lord Jesus Christ warned in these words: "I will kill her children with death" (Rev.2:23). A consideration of the historical work of Jehu in the destruction of Ahab's literal family adds dreadful emphasis to the Lord's words. Here is a *list of Jehu's accomplishments*:

- 2 Kings 9:26 - He slays Jehoram son of Ahab and casts him into Naboth's field;
- 2 Kings 9:27 - Orders the slaying of Ahaziah the son of Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel;
- 2 Kings 9:30-37 - Slays Jezebel, treads her underfoot and the dogs eat her;
- 2 Kings 10:1-10 - Terrifies the men of Samaria into killing seventy of Ahab's sons;
- 2 Kings 10:12-14 - Kills 42 princes of the court of Ahaziah king of Judah, grandson of Ahab and Jezebel through Athaliah;
- 2 Kings 10:17 - Slays all those in Samaria connected with Ahab;
- 2 Kings 10:18-28 - Destroys a multitude of Baal worshippers that packed into the house of Baal.
- 2 Kings 10:11 - The house of Ahab is finally extinguished.

In the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Matt.1 there are significant omissions. If we include the reign of Athaliah, four monarchs are missing from the genealogy; they are Ahaziah, the son of Athaliah, Athaliah herself, Joash and Amaziah (Matt.1:8-9). These four would come between Joram and Uzziah ("Ozias"). Such was the perversity of this house of Ahab (as it permeated into Judah) that Yahweh visited the iniquity of that house unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Him (Deut.5:9-10).

v17. *"shall Elisha slay"* - Elisha took the sword against no man. Apart from the 42 young men whom the two she bears slew when they mocked him (2 Kings 2:24), Elisha's whole ministry was characterised by salvation as his name indicates. His work was one of compassion and instruction, and he is found in constant association with the sons of the prophets (2 Kings 2:3; 4:38; 5:22; 6:1-6). Elisha's 'slaying' was by the sword of the spirit as Yahweh expressed to Hosea the prophet, "I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth" (Hos. 6:5, cp. Heb.4:12). But Yahweh's word is not contradictory; it wasn't only for this reason that Elisha slew no one but also for the reason that Jehu left no one of the house of Ahab to be slain!

v18. *"I have left me seven thousand in Israel"* - Note the marginal alternative, "yet will I leave remaining"; this is supported by the renditions in Rotherham and the RSV. Paul interprets it "reserved to myself" (Rom.11:4). Seven thousand is a symbolic number (Rev.11:13) and is indicative of the completeness of God's covenant people. God will preserve the people of His covenant and He will do that during

the judgments which He will pour out upon the earth (see Isa.1:9; 10:20; 17:4-6). Yahweh of armies was still at work despite Elijah's protestation, and that work was not merely for the purpose of destroying his enemies but also for preserving the faithful.

18 ^cYet I have left *me* seven thousand in Is^r-ra-^l-^{el}, all the knees which have not bowed unto ^eBā'-^{äl}, and every mouth which hath not ^skissed him.

"every mouth which hath not kissed him" - Kissing was a common form of idolatry and the act itself was one of endearment (see Job 31:26-27; Hosea 13:2). Those in Israel who had kissed Baal had publicly denied Yahweh.

At the coming of the Son of God the nations will be caused to bow the knee (Phil. 2:10) and kiss the Son lest they perish (Psa.2:12).

CHAPTER 8 - 1 KINGS 19:19-21 THE CALL OF ELISHA

The drought had now been broken and prospects were good in Abel-meholah, which in the Hebrew means, "the meadow of the dance". This township was located on the eastern side of the Jordan, near the Sea of Galilee and almost opposite to where the valley of Jezreel plunged down into the Valley of Jordan. It was situated in a very fertile part of the land of Israel and partook of the rain of heaven when many parts of the south were normally dry and parched.

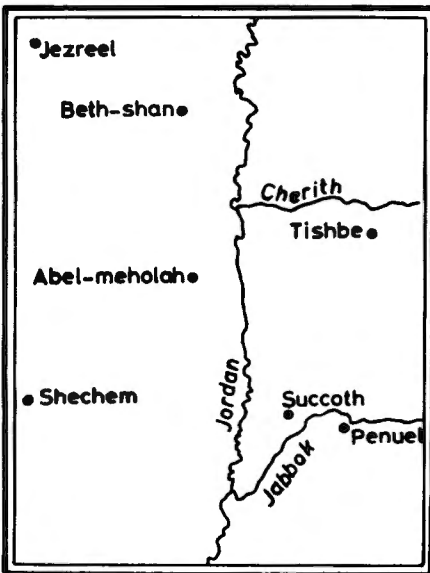
v19. "*found Elisha the son of Shaphat plowing*" - The circumstances in which



19 ¶ So he departed thence, and found E-li'-shā the son of Shā'phāt, who was plowing with ^htwelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and E-li'-jāh passed by him, and cast his 'mantle upon him.

Elijah found Elisha, indicate that Elisha lived in relative prosperity and plenty. He therefore, would contrast sharply with the one who came to call him.

"twelve yoke" - He seems to have been ploughing with 12 separate pairs of oxen, under the care of his servants and with himself guiding the last pair. One wonders if Elijah's mind would have been exercised by the vision before him in that he saw Elisha ploughing at Abel-meholah with the twelve yoke of oxen. He himself had tried to unite Israel in the symbolism of the twelve stones on mount Carmel. Did he now see Elisha as his successor ploughing with the tribes of Israel that they might, as the prophet Hosea so beautifully expressed it, "sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek Yahweh till He come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hosea 10:12).



"he with the twelfth" - This of course would be the most responsible position, a position from whence he could watch the others ploughing and ensure that it was straight and properly done.

"cast his mantle upon him" - Striding past Elisha the great prophet throws the symbol of his prophetic office across the shoulders of the younger man, and moves on almost in indifference to what he has done!

v20. "kiss my father and my mother" - This is a very interesting statement and one which has been taken by some to mean that Elisha hesitated to accept the call that Elijah offered him. Rather, we think the opposite is the case. In Luke 9 the Lord Jesus Christ alludes to this incident in a most interesting context.

He had been passing through Samaria on his way up to Jerusalem and the Samaritans had refused to receive him. As a result of this James and John asked the Lord whether he would bring down fire from heaven even as Elijah did (Luke 9:54). The Lord's reply is in these words, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (v56). When Elisha took over from Elijah in the great work of representing Yahweh to the nation, the implementation of the principles of the still small voice of salvation was the hallmark of his mission. It is in that context that we read in the next few verses of Luke chapter nine the incident of the man who voluntarily offered himself to the service of Christ but added "let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house". The answer of the Lord is contained in v62: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God". Some seizing upon this statement would imply from it

that what Elisha had done was an act of unfaithfulness. However, when we look back at the story of Elisha, a man certainly fit for the Kingdom of God, we see that his determination was to bid farewell to his parents once and for all. From henceforth his ploughing would be only in the fields of the gospel.

"Go back again" - This terse statement of the great prophet of Gilead seems to imply, "Permission **granted but consider** the meaning of what I have done in the great privilege I have offered you". We make that suggestion as the phrase here is very difficult to interpret.

20 And he left the oxen, and ran after E-li'-jäh, and said, ^kLet me, I pray thee, ^lkiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

21 And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the ⁿinstruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after E-li'-jäh, and ^pministered unto him.

v21. *"boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen"* - In this action Elisha seems to sever all connection with his former way of life. This deliberate act in itself speaks of a complete determination to follow a different course of life of total dedication, and to make it impossible to return to his previous occupation. That this action had this meaning seems to be supported in a later story concerning David, when he went to purchase the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite that he might there erect an altar to

Yahweh. On that occasion, when the great king requested Araunah to sell that portion, he was offered it without cost. However, David would not accept it under those conditions and when he finally did sacrifice to Yahweh there, he took oxen as a burnt offering and used the instruments of the oxen for wood (2 Sam.24:20-24). In this way David the king indicated the completeness of the sacrifice he was then making.

"gave unto the people and they did eat" - Here Elisha seems to preside over a sacrificial meal and achieves agreement in principle with his action to leave the family and his former way of life.

"ministered unto him" - From this point on he becomes the devoted servant of Elijah and though coming from circumstances of seeming prosperity in contrast to that of the harsh life of the prophet of Gilead, he takes a very subservient position and is known from this point onwards as "he that poured water on the hands of Elijah (2 Kings 3:11).

From this point in the narrative the work of Elijah seems to have come to an end. Although he is to reappear later in the vineyard of Naboth, there to denounce Ahab for his wickedness in appropriating that inheritance, little is heard of Elijah again until the time comes for him to depart the earth and to leave way for Elisha to take over the work of administering the still small voice to Israel.

So the history of Elijah's ministry is broken now by a different narrative as we read in 1 Kings chapter 20 of the wars that Ahab conducted against Ben-hadad, king of Syria. In those wars he was assisted by messages from God who sent him a



Elisha prepares to roast two oxen, using his plow for kindling wood.

COMPARISON BETWEEN:

ELIJAH - **ELISHA**
JOHN THE BAPTIST - **THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**

1. Elijah came at a time of extreme wickedness in Israel (2 Kings 16:21). So did John (Matt.3:7).
2. John not only came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17) but also resembled that great prophet (2 Kings 1:8, cf. Matt.3:4).
3. Both pronounced judgments on Israel (1 Kings 18:18; Matt.3:7, 12).
4. After slaying the prophets of Baal on Carmel, Elijah races before Ahab's chariot to show that the throne was to be restored on the basis of Truth (1 Kings 18:46). John also was a forerunner to proclaim the coming of the Royal Majesty (Mal.3:1; John 1:15; 29-34; Luke 1:76-79).
5. Elijah gave way to the gentler Elisha as John also had to decrease to make way for the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Kings 19:19; John 3:30; 10-16; Matt.11:28-30).
6. Elijah's mantle changed hands at the bank of Jordan (2 Kings 2:7, 13). So the Lord Jesus Christ was manifested in the baptism of John on the banks of Jordan from which moment he began to take over the work from John (Matt.3:6, 17).
7. Elisha means the "salvation of God", Jesus "the salvation of Yahweh".
8. Upon Elisha's taking up of the work, he became recognised as occupying the firstborn position (2 Kings 2:9). Jesus was the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:27).
9. Elisha's work extended beyond the confines of Israel and was found among the Gentiles (2 Kings 5). Although Jesus did not go outside of the confines of Israel yet it was through his sacrifice that salvation was extended to the nations. He himself also indicated that this would be the case by the contact which he had with those other than Israel (Matt.15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).
10. Elisha became accepted by the kings of nations (2 Kings 8: 7-8), so too will the Lord Jesus Christ at his reappearing (Psa.72:8-11, 17).

prophet and a man of God (see v13, v22 and v28) to instruct him and to warn him against the Syrians which enabled him to win two decisive victories. Foolishly, however, the king fails to consolidate his victory when he released Ben-hadad the king after he had captured him (vv.32-34). For this he is denounced by one of the sons of the prophets who, in the Name of Yahweh, warns Ahab now that he has let this great opportunity slip through his fingers, he is to pay a heavy price for what he has done. Subsequent history, soon to burst upon the nation, only verified too well the prophet's warning!

CHAPTER 9 - 1 KINGS 21:1-29 THE VINEYARD OF NABOTH

“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up” - verse 25.

There is no doubt that this verse supplies a summary to the ugly events contained in this chapter. King Ahab has been wonderfully victorious in a series of battles over the Syrians. The destructive drought has ended and the fertility and productivity of the earth is again abundant. In the exclusively regal setting of Jezreel it came into the heart of the king to expand his holdings and his wealth. In the spirit of the earlier great king Solomon, who wrote, “I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits”, Ahab seeks the single possession of a humble and faithful servant, Naboth the Jezreelite. Unwilling to forcibly dispose of Naboth because of his religious conviction, this scandalous and ignoble king draws in his more brutal wife to arrange what his conscience told him should not be done. Using all the power and intrigue of a wicked throne, Jezebel secures her husband’s desire. This incident, so epitomizing the depth of her wickedness, is chosen by God as the time when by the mouth of the righteous prophet Elijah, the house of Ahab should know its coming destruction.

v1. *“And it came to pass after these things”* - How long after we are not informed but the king of Israel, now established by his successes against the Syrians, would be anxious to consolidate his kingdom, to cement his rule over Israel and to broaden the extent of his own properties. With this background we come to this story concerning his acquisition of the vineyard of Naboth through the brutal murder of that righteous man.

“Naboth” - In the Hebrew his name means “fruit”, “produce”. He was an Israelite indeed, harmlessly producing the fruits of the spirit (Matt.7:16; Gal.5:22).

“the Jezreelite” - He was an inhabitant of that city where Jezebel was enthroned, a city whose name means “God sows”. And this man truly had sown to the things of the spirit in a pure motive (Gal.6:7-8; 1 Pet.1:23).

“a vineyard” - Vineyards were standing symbols of Yahweh’s inheritance for His people (see Hosea 2:15; Amos 9:14). The feature about the vineyard which made it a very apt symbol of the inheritance was the fact that a vineyard takes a long time to establish and much work is involved in order to get the vineyard to productivity. Note the work involved as outlined, for example, in Isa.5:1-4. It is said also that a vineyard does not come into full production until it has been established for at least seven years and, therefore, the expression in the Scriptures, “to plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them” denotes an inheritance that has been possessed for some years of time - for example, Amos 9:14; Isa.65:21. Israel were the vineyard of Yahweh built up over many years, established by the hard work that Yahweh had put into that nation when He planted it upon the mountains of Israel (see *Psalms 80:8-16*). The Lord Jesus Christ added emphasis to the symbology of the vineyard as the in-

heritage of God in the wonderful parable recorded for us in Mark 12:1-12.

"hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria" - Jezreel had long been the stronghold of that iniquitous queen Jezebel (link 18:46 to 19:1, also compare 21:8-10 and 2 Kings 9:30). It is a testimony to the character of Naboth that he could maintain his faithfulness and integrity living in such a dreadful environment as he did.

CHAPTER 21

AND it came to pass after these things, *that* Nā'bōth the Jēz-rēel-ite had a vineyard, which *was* in Jēz-rēel, hard by the palace of Ā'hāb king of Sā-mār'-i-ā.

2 And Ā'hāb spake unto Nā'bōth, saying, "Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.

v2. *"Ahab spake unto Naboth"* - It would seem by a comparison with the record that Ahab was living at Samaria at this time (see v18, cf. 20:43 with v4). So he must have come firstly to Jezreel to enquire of Naboth about the purchase of this vineyard; this action and his optional terms of purchase indicate his great desire for this plot of ground.

"a garden of herbs" - The RSV has a "vegetable garden". However the expression seems to denote a garden for exotic plants

designed more for pleasure than for profit (cp. Eccles.2:4-6). Such a garden would be so set up as to provide the necessary pleasure without much expenditure of energy by the king thereby breeding a careless and indolent spirit. It is in this sense that 'the garden of herbs' is used as a symbol of all that is contrary to Yahweh's intended occupation for Israel (see Deut.11:10-11).

v3. *"Yahweh forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my father's unto thee"* - Naboth's refusal was solidly based upon his religious convictions. It was not a question of a material possession but rather a question of a spiritual inheritance that Naboth was concerned about. In the Law it stated that the inheritance was never to be sold (Num.36:7) and if ever the sale would become necessary because of economic necessity, it would always revert back to the original owner at the year of jubilee (Lev.25:13-28). It was wrong of Ahab as the king to tempt Naboth to sell his inheritance. When God's Kingdom is finally established upon the earth under the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ, a law is already laid down whereby a king shall never interfere with another man's inheritance (see Ezek. 46:18).

3 And Nā'bōth said to Ā'hāb, The LORD forbid it me, *that* I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.

4 And Ā'hāb *came* into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Nā'-bōth the Jēz-rēel-ite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

v4. *"heavy and displeased"* - RSV "vexed and sullen".

"for he had said I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers" - In this statement we are informed of the ruminations of Ahab's mind as he turned over the implications of Naboth's refusal. We must note that it was the religious factor that worried Ahab for he knew sufficient about the Truth to realise the nature of the objection and ob-

viously had some conscience on the matter.

“turned away his face and would eat no bread” - Eloquent testimony to the weakness of this spineless king as he turned away to the wall and acted like a spoilt and angry child. He was the ruler of Israel and in a position, if he would, to grasp that inheritance by force; which he would dearly have loved to do yet felt frustrated by the Law of God, which he dearly wished to disregard!

v5-14. - *Jezebel's Scheme for the Murder of Naboth*

v5. *“but Jezebel his wife”* - Contrast her stronger and determined character against that of the weakness of Ahab. Her characteristic determination was implied also when we considered 1 Kings 19:1. Like the alliance between church and state her approach to the matter is bold, determined and ruthless (see Rev.18, especially v7).

v6. *“I will not give thee my vineyard”* - Here again is another illuminating statement, made in the record to illustrate the weakness of this king as he faces the determination of his ruthless wife. He badly misrepresents the reason why Naboth would not sell his vineyard, excluding all reference to the religious conviction upon which Naboth had based his objection. Back in verse four we read the thoughts of his own mind, that it was this conviction concerning God's Law that frustrated him; but here before his wife all such feelings of religious conviction fled from him and he represented Naboth's refusal as being blunt and lacking any spiritual content.

5 ¶ But ^sJēz'-ē-bēl his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?

6 And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Nā'-bōth the Jēz'-rēēl-ite, 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.

7 And Jēz'-ē-bēl his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Īs'-rā-ēl? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: ^mI will give thee the vineyard of Nā'-bōth the Jēz'-rēēl-ite.

8 ⁿSo she wrote letters in Ā'hāb's name, and sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters unto the ^oelders and to the nobles that *were* in his city, dwelling with Nā'-bōth.

v7. *“Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?”* - This is all that mattered to Jezebel; the exercise of physical force.

“thine heart be merry” - This approach would be typical of her whole life: pandering to the lusts of men in order that she may gain her own ends and at the same time settling all their objections by fulfilling all the desires of their soul. No wonder the book of Revelation sees this woman as the personal prototype of that great religious system of whoredom which should overtake the world and be dominant at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. How apt a description in Revelation, “For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her

fornication, and the kings of the earth are waxed rich in the abundance of her delicacies” (18:3).

“I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” - Again a statement indicative of her bold confidence, but note how she uses the full title of Naboth and thereby spells out the depth of her iniquitous action. Interpreted, this title reads, “the vineyard, the fruits of which has resulted from that which God hath sowed”.

v8. *“she wrote letters in Ahab's name”* - The queen was really the authority.

"his seal" - This also was a symbol of the regal authority which she now uses freely (see Gen.38:18; Neh.9:38; 10:1; Esth.3:10-12, 8:8; Dan.6:17). Her free use of his authority goes unquestioned by the king, which indicates also the way in which he capitulated entirely to her dominance. If she could obtain what the sulking king wanted, then he wouldn't question how it was done!

"the elders and the nobles" - Ready at hand were these accomplices who were no doubt her disciples and despised Naboth as she also did. They were typical of the class who allied themselves with the political leaders of the day in order that they may procure the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt.26:3-4).

"dwelling with Naboth" - A shocking indictment upon these men who lived with Naboth in his home city. He was truly "wounded in the house of his friends" (see Zech.13:6).

v9. "proclaim a fast" - The wicked deed about to be done is to be clothed with religious solemnities. Fasting was called for as the outward token of a deep sense of guilt, repentance and mourning and also on some occasions to build up a dramatic suspense because of some great evil that had been committed for which the guilty were about to be named (Joel 1:14; 2:15).

"set Naboth on high among the people" - A clever scheme so as to expose with deeper horror the revelation of his so-called impiety.

v10. "set two men" - Jezebel proceeds with her plan in accordance with all that God had laid down in His Law. Her's was an act of *supreme hypocrisy*. Two witnesses were required to obtain the death sentence under the Law of Moses (Num. 35:30; Deut.17:6). In a similar fashion the hypocritical leaders in the days of the Lord Jesus Christ called upon false witnesses to pave the way for his execution (Matt.26:59).

9 And she wrote in the letters, saying, ⁹Proclaim a fast, and set Nā' - bōth on high among the people:

10 And set two men, ¹⁰sons of ²Be' - li-āl, before him, ¹⁰to bear witness against him, saying, "Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And *then* carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

11 And the men of his city, *even* the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jēz' - ē - bēl had sent unto them, *and* as it *was* written in the letters which she had sent unto them.

12 They proclaimed a fast, and set Nā' - bōth on high among the people.

"sons of Belial" - Belial signifies "worthlessness" and plenty of these types would be available in Jezebel's company.

"blaspheme God and the king" - Again a meticulous observance of the letter of the Law as the Law connected these two charges of blasphemy against the king and against God Whom the ruler was considered to represent (Ex.22:28). What a shocking charge to bring against a man of integrity like Naboth especially when the king here in question was Ahab, himself a great

blasphemer. Blasphemy against God was punishable by death (Lev.24:16; Deut. 13:9-10). It is interesting to note that the procedures here adopted by Jezebel would indicate that Elijah's reform must have done some good as she proceeded very carefully along the principles outlined in the Law of Moses. Like Naboth, the Lord Jesus Christ was falsely convicted of similar charges of blasphemy against God



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and king (see Mark 14:62-64 and John 19:12).

"and then carry him out" - Note the tone of her complete confidence in the outcome of such plans.

13 And there came in two men, children of Bē'-lī-āl, and sat before him: and the men of Bē'-lī-āl witnessed against him, *even* against Nā'-bōth, in the presence of the people, saying, Nā'-bōth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and ^bstoned him with stones, that he died.

14 Then they sent to Jēz'-ē-bēl, saying, Nā'-bōth is stoned, and is dead.

15 ¶ And it came to pass, when Jēz'-ē-bēl heard that Nā'-bōth was stoned, and was dead, that Jēz'-ē-bēl said to Ā'-hāb, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Nā'-bōth the Jēz'-rēel-īte, which he refused to give thee for money: for Nā'-bōth is not alive, but dead.

v13. *"carry him forth out of the city"* - So that the city would not become polluted through the shedding of his blood he is stoned with his sons in his own vineyard (2 Kings 9:26). As great a tragedy as this was, it was eclipsed by the greater tragedy when the Lord Jesus Christ also "suffered without the gate" (Heb.13:12) and died, as it were in the vineyard of Yahweh's inheritance.

v14. *"Naboth is stoned and is dead"* - So the message was carried to the king who stood aloof from all these transactions and probably felt that he was 'innocent of the blood of this just person'! (cp.Matt.27:24)

v15. *"for Naboth is not alive but dead"* -

The messenger gives no explanation of how Naboth died and no explanation is sought by the king. Like Pilate the Roman governor, Ahab sought to wash his hands of the whole affair whilst at the same time profiting from what had happened. Yahweh watched it all and would by no means clear the guilty!

v16-24 - *Elijah meets Ahab at the Scene of the Crime*

"Ahab rose up" - The deed having been done, Ahab's mood of despondency lifts and he immediately goes to take possession of the inheritance. By comparing the historical record we note that he did this the day after the dreadful murder had been committed in the very vineyard of which he now went to take possession (2 Kings 9:26). Such was the dark evil of this man's soul, and such was the ruling passion of his envy and greed, that he could not even wait for at least the memory of this man to fade before stepping in to take over the reward of his iniquity. "Come, let us kill him and let us seize on his inheritance"! (Matt.21:38)

"to take possession of it" - Naboth was dead and along with him all the heirs of the vineyard had been killed. The vineyard now becomes the property of the state. "Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours" (Mark 12:7).

v17. *"And the word of Yahweh came to Elijah"* - Nothing had been heard of Elijah since the call of Elisha. No doubt Ahab the king had dismissed him from his life. Elijah's sudden reappearance would be unexpected by Ahab and would strike into his heart with the direst horror!

v18. *"which is in Samaria"* - The RV has "which dwelleth in Samaria"; but the king had now "gone down" to Jezreel where Naboth's vineyard was.

16 And it came to pass, when Ā'-hāb heard that Nā'-bōth was dead, that Ā'-hāb rose up to go down to the vineyard of Nā'-bōth the Jēz'-rēel-ite, to take possession of it.

17 ¶ And the word of the LORD came to Ē-ī'-jāh the Tish'-bite, saying,

18 Arise, go down to meet Ā'-hāb king of Is'-rā-ēl, which is in Sā-mār'-i-ā: behold, *he is* in the vineyard of Nā'-bōth, whither he is gone down to possess it.

19 And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, ^pThus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, ^rIn the place where 'dogs licked the blood of Nā'-bōth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.

v19. *"in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall the dogs lick thy blood, even thine"* - Imagine the reaction of Ahab as he strolled into this lovely vineyard which he had now come to possess hard against the shadow of his own palace. Jezreel was like a jewel situated at the southern end of the plain of Jezreel, sparkling like a green emerald amidst the fields of plenty that surrounded it. The king's heart would be full as he took in the aroma and the vista now before him and contemplated turning this whole place into a botanical garden. What a fearful jolt back to reality he must have experienced as he caught sight of the prophet from Gilead standing amidst the vines. The presence of this shaggy prophet in his leather

sheath standing there with face like a flint and eyes flashing with divine judgment, would strike home to the king with awful reality the terrible deed which he had perpetrated to gain this inheritance for himself.

v20. *"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"* - Ahab instantly regarded Elijah as an enemy. Clearly implicit in the words, "found me", are feelings of guilt and remorse, previously buried beneath the fulfilment and gratification of his lusts.

"sold thyself to work evil" - Note that the expression, "sold thyself", is repeated in v25. It is an interesting phrase as it implies that Ahab had something to sell. In fact, the king knew better than the way he was here behaving; he had a conviction of a sort concerning the truth of God which came to the surface at various times in his life. However, in the presence of his wife Jezebel, he miserably failed, losing all his convictions and proving himself the spineless man that he truly was. A man who has some religious conviction and some conscience concerning it, has something to sell and, therefore, his sin is the greater. In speaking of the inherent weakness of his nature the apostle Paul said he was "carnal, sold unto sin" (Rom. 7:14). This is true of all of us at some time of our life. How much more is this so when we have a conviction of the Truth and have something to sell?

"in the sight of Yahweh" - This indictment also clearly implied that his deeds were done in the full knowledge of the fact that they were wrong. Ahab had openly provoked and tempted Yahweh.

v21. *"will take away thy posterity"* - Even as he had destroyed Naboth's posterity (see 2 Kings 9:26). From this reference in Kings we learn the interesting fact that on the occasion when Elijah denounced Ahab in these scathing terms, the king was accompanied by Jehu and Bidkar (also v25 of 2 Kings 9). Jehu was to be the man, later raised up by Yahweh, to begin to bring to an end the iniquity of Israel. It was through the sword of Jehu that the whole house of Ahab and all those associated with him were swept into the abyss.



Elijah accuses Ahab in the vineyard.

v22. "And will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah" - Jeroboam's house crashed in a welter of blood when Baasha murdered his son Nadab along with the other members of his

20 And Ā'-hāb said to Ē-lī'-jāh, "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.

21 Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ā'-hāb him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Īs'-rā-ēl.

22 And will make thine house like the house of Jēr-ō-bō'-ām the son of Nē'-bāt, and like the house of Bā-āsh'-ā the son of Ā-hī'-jāh, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Īs'-rā-ēl to sin.

family and took control of the kingdom (1 Kings 15:27-30). The new dynasty established by Baasha, ended also in violence when Zimri murdered Elah and all Baasha's house (1 Kings 16:10-13). Yahweh, through His prophets, had denounced all these dynasties in the same form of words (cf. 14:11; 16:4; 21:24). When the time came for Jezebel also to be taken away as an ugly blot upon the surface of the earth, her words indicate that she had actually thought about the previous dynasties but had failed to see the lesson of Yahweh's judgments (2 Kings 9:31). Omri, Ahab's father, was popularly supported when he rose up against the treacherous

Zimri, who had slain king Baasha and all his house. But now Omri's house, represented in his son Ahab and his wife Jezebel, had soaked their hands in the blood of a harmless and righteous family of Israel. So Zimri's fate must now come upon the house of Ahab!

v23. "Jezebel also" - Note that Yahweh placed the chief blame for the murder of Naboth upon the shoulders of Ahab. While He did not by any means clear Jezebel, yet Ahab was clearly given to understand that, as the man and the king, his was the greater responsibility for the crime that had been committed.

"the dogs shall eat" - Dogs were an abomination in Israel (Deut.23:18). They were not the domesticated tame dog that we know in our western world, but the semi-wild dog that roamed the streets of the cities and became a symbol of cruel and vicious men (Psa.22:16-20; Psa.59:6, 14, 15). The dog was considered an extremely unclean animal (Isa.66:3) and to be called "a dog" was a term of humiliating reproach (1 Sam.24:14; 2 Sam.3:8; 9:8; 16:9). When God finally builds the walls of the new Jerusalem and the gates close behind the righteous who have kept the Truth, those left "without are dogs" (Rev.22:15).

23 And of Jēz'-ē-bēl also spake the LORD, saying, 'The dogs shall

"by the wall of Jezreel" - Note the marginal alternative "ditch"; the Hebrew word indicates "an entrenchment". The RSV renders it "the bounds of Jezreel"; Rotherham "in

the townland of Jezreel". This fair city was to bear the pollution of Jezebel's blood. She too was to be eaten by dogs "in the portion of Jezreel" (2 Kings 9:36).

The strength of Yahweh's abhorrence of this polluted female was to be seen in the manner of her death. In the Scriptures dogs are noted for their disgusting habit of eating rubbish and offal which would be cast into "the ditch" which surrounded the cities (1 Kings 14:11; 16:4). This loathsome scavenger, when reduced by extreme hunger, would even lap up its own vomit, brought up because of the nauseating material scavenged among the pollutions of the city. This disgusting habit of the dog became noted in the Scripture as the symbol of man's last degraded state before he would pass into oblivion (Prov.26:11; 2 Pet.2:22).



THE DEATH OF JEZEBEL — *Dorf*

However, such was the depth of the iniquity of Jezebel, that not even the dogs could swallow her skull, hands and her feet! (2 Kings 9:30-37) After having their fill of the rest of her body these loathsome creatures would slink away leaving the skull, hands and feet as "dung upon the face of the field" (verse 37). Symbolically, Yahweh indicated His utter abhorrence of this woman for upon the ground, left by the dogs, were those three things which spoke of the exercise of her mind, the work of her hands and the paths of her feet, all of which she had totally dedicated to the service of evil. As said the prophet Isaiah, "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths" (Isa.59:7 and cp. Prov.6:17-18).

24 ^a Him that dieth of \bar{A} '-h \bar{a} b in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.

25 ¶ But ^cthere was none like unto \bar{A} '-h \bar{a} b, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom J \bar{e} z'- \bar{e} -b \bar{e} l his wife stirred up.

26 And he did very ^dabominably ^ein following ^fidols, according to all things as did the ^g \bar{A} m'- \bar{o} -rites, whom the LORD ^hcast out before the children of \bar{I} s'-r \bar{a} - \bar{e} l.

27 And it came to pass, when \bar{A} '-h \bar{a} b heard those words, that he ⁱrent his clothes, and put ^ksackcloth upon his flesh, and ^lfasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

28 And the word of the LORD came to \bar{E} -l \bar{i} '-j \bar{a} h the Tish'-b \bar{i} te, saying,

29 Seest thou how \bar{A} '-h \bar{a} b ^mhumbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but ⁿin his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

v25. "But there was none like unto Ahab" - The death of Naboth had been truly typical of God's only begotten Son as both of them were slain by the greedy leaders of the nation who endeavoured to seize upon the inheritance. Immediately after *this* dastardly deed Ahab is branded as being the worst of Israel's kings, especially wicked because he knew a better way but had entirely yielded to the influences of his iniquitous wife, whom he had wilfully brought into the nation.

"whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" - Hebrew means "to prick", "to incite", "to stimulate" - see Introduction.

v26. "as did the Amorites" - This name indicates people of "the hill country" and was used as a general designation for those Canaanites who dwelt in the mountainous regions of Israel before God's people entered

into the land. The rites practised by these people in the name of their religion were particularly offensive (see Gen.15:16; 2 Kings 21:11; Amos 2:9).

v27. "went softly" - RSV has "dejectedly". This was a sign of humility of spirit (Isa.38:15). Ahab's was a temporary yet a sincere repentance but he still needed to learn the true principle of fasting - see Isa.58:5-7. The very fact that Yahweh acknowledges that this repentance was sincere, testifies to the double nature of the man, and indicates that if he could have retained his faith he would have been able to restrain the evil of his nature, and to have been a true king in Israel.

v29. "but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house" - Back in verse nineteen the indictment of Yahweh was that "in the place where the dog's lick the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood even thine". In actual fact Ahab did not suffer this condemnation as this verse 29 indicates. Ahab the king was slain in a subsequent battle against Syria when a man "drew a bow at a venture" (1 Kings 22:34) and the arrow, guided unerringly by the power of Yahweh, penetrated the small

links of his armour and struck the king, mortally wounding him. He was immediately driven away from the scene of the battle but died on the way to the city of Samaria. In Samaria they washed his chariot in the pool of Samaria and as they did so the dogs in the city came and licked up his blood (vv.37-38). Thus Ahab did not die in Jezreel, as Elijah had originally said that he would, but in Samaria - Yahweh changing this indictment because of his repentance when convicted by the prophet from Gilead. However, in the death of Ahab there was further poetic justice as we read in 1 Kings 22:37-38 (RSV) that the pool in which they washed his chariot was one in which the harlots of that city were accustomed to wash their bodies. Through his marriage of Jezebel and her introduction to the nation, Ahab had introduced into the nation the iniquity of harlotry, both spiritual and literal. It was, therefore, appropriate that his blood, the symbol of his life, should finally be mingled with all the pollution associated with that foul practice of harlotry.

In accordance with the indictment upon his house, his son Joram, when slain by Jehu, was cast into the vineyard of Naboth where dogs licked up his blood in that same plot of ground (2 Kings 9:25-26). So the judgments of Yahweh came to pass. The murder of Naboth was avenged and the house of Ahab began to fall before the terrible retribution wielded by the sword of Jehu.

CHAPTER 10 - 2 KINGS 2:1-18

THE DEPARTURE OF ELIJAH IN THE STORM

It would seem from the statement of 1 Kings 22:1-2 that Ahab reigned for a further three years after the death of Naboth, before he was slain in the battle with Syria. He was succeeded in the throne by Ahaziah, his son by Jezebel, who reigned upon the throne of Israel for a period of 2 years (1 Kings 22:51). From this point on, the political fortunes of the kingdom of Israel began to decline very rapidly. The opening verse of the Second Book of Kings records the fact that Moab rebelled against them and set up opposition to Israel on the eastern banks of the Jordan. The very next verse informs us that Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in the upper chamber and suffered injury from which he later died.

Ahaziah whose name means "Yahweh hath sustained" was a true product of his father. He was a weak and a faithless king and "he walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam" (1 Kings 22:52). He proved to be a very suspicious man and sought to enquire of Baalzebub the "lord of the flies", as to whether he would recover from his accident (2 Kings 1:3). Elijah addressed him as "the king of Samaria" (2 Kings 1:3), a true title of one who succeeded the iniquity of his father Ahab and grandfather Omri, who had first established Samaria as the capital city of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 16:24, 29, 32). The Moabites must have perceived his weakness and immediately seized upon the opportunity to revolt from the authority of Israel (2 Kings 1:1). During the course of Ahaziah's 2-year reign, Jehoshaphat in the south, joined affinity with him and they combined together in a shipbuilding project at Ezion-Geber but the ships were destroyed before ever they sailed for Tarshish (2 Chron.20:35-37). This seems to have been the last venture by Jehoshaphat in his attempt to weld the houses of Judah and Israel together. Having learned a bitter lesson that it does not pay to love those who hate Yahweh, the great man of Judah ceased from that moment onwards to form any further alliance (1 Kings 22:49).

Elijah reappears during the course of the reign of Ahaziah and in 2 Kings 1, after the king had sent to Baalzebub the god of Ekron to enquire as to his recovery from his accident, Elijah comes to indict this wicked king. In this chapter, Elijah twice brings down fire from heaven to consume two bands of soldiers with their captains whom the iniquitous king had sent to apprehend him (2 Kings 1:9-14). According to the word of Yahweh in the mouth of Elijah, the king died soon after and thus brought to an end a worthless life (verses 16-17). Upon his death the work of Elijah also came to an end and the way was now paved for Elisha to speak with a still small voice to the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

v.1-7 THE JOURNEY TO JORDAN

v1. *"And it came to pass, when Yahweh would take up Elijah"* - As we come now to the ascension of Elijah we find him in company with Elisha and this is the first time the two are mentioned together since Elisha's call some ten years earlier (1 Kings 19:19). During the course of those ten years Elisha had become known as Elijah's servant, described eloquently by the words, "he that poured water on the hands of Elijah" (2 Kings 3:11). Now, as the time has come for Elijah to be taken

up into heaven - indicative of the fact that he was a totally dedicated servant of Yahweh - we find these two great men together at this dramatic point in history.

AND it came to pass, when the LORD would ^gtake up ^hE-^li'-jäh into heaven by a whirlwind, that E-^li'-jäh went with ^kE-^li'-shä from ^lGil'-gäl.

"Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal" -

This is not the Gilgal associated with the crossing of the river Jordan when Israel came into the land. Note they "went down" to Bethel from this Gilgal which could not,

therefore, be in the very lowland of the Jordan (v2). This particular Gilgal seems to have been west of Shiloh on the way to Shechem (cf. Deut. 11:30; Gen. 12:6). In history it had become associated with idolatrous Bethel (Hosea 4:15; 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4-5, 5:4-5). Its Hebrew name means a "circle" or "rolling away", a name which originated with the naming of the first Gilgal by the river Jordan, when Israel were circumcised a second time on entering into the holy land when "the reproach of Egypt" was rolled away (Josh. 5:2, 9). This could have been the residence of Elisha at this particular time, as we note he "came again" to Gilgal and was received by the sons of the prophets (who numbered some one hundred men), just as though their respected elder was returning home (4:38, 43 cp. 5:3).

v2. *"Yahweh hath sent me to Bethel"* - Elijah repeats this expression in v4 and v6 as he went from place to place. These three centres that he mentions; Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho, were obviously prominent headquarters of the schools of the prophets (cp. v3, v5). Before his departure Elijah was to "strengthen the things that remain". Bethel means "the house of God" and was so named by Jacob when he received the vision of the staircase that linked heaven and earth (Gen. 28:10-22), a name later confirmed by God in Gen. 35:14-15. It is the first place where the land was specifically mentioned as promised to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-17). We note in Gen. 35:13-15 that the emphasis is three times on God "*speaking*" to Jacob. This theme is taken up by Hosea in Hos. 12:4 where the prophet points out that God spoke at Bethel to the *whole nation!* God's message to them arose from the determination on the part of Jacob when at Peniel to serve God by clinging to the angel rather than to trust in his own ingenuity. So Hosea exhorts the whole nation to "wait on thy God continually" (Hos. 12:6). Bethel had long association with the history of Israel and (after Jerusalem and Samaria) is the most mentioned of the historical cities which were memorialised by the incidents recorded in Israel's history. Later on Samuel judged Israel from Bethel (1 Sam. 7:16). Still further in the history of Israel, Jeroboam established Bethel as a centre of his calf worship (1 Kings 12:32). Under Jeroboam the second it became his royal residence, where he lived in opulence and luxury (Amos 7:13; 3:14-15).

"as Yahweh liveth and as thy soul liveth" - Here is an emphatic expression of loyalty on the part of Elisha to Elijah, based upon the fact of Elijah's affinity with Yahweh (cp. 4:30 and 1 Sam. 20:3).

v3. *"the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel"* - Samuel was the recognised head of a new order of prophets (Acts 3:24; 13:20; Heb. 11:32). This new order of prophets seems to have originated in the school of the prophets originally held at Ramah where Samuel presided over them as their president (1 Sam. 10:9-12; 19:19-20). From that time there was apparently a company at Gilgal, at Bethel and at

Jericho where they seemed to hold weekly and monthly meetings (2 Kings 4:23). We find Elisha in his house with the elders (2 Kings 6:32) indicative of the fact that by this time the sons of prophets had been knit together into a well-organised and established team.

2 And E-lī-jāh said unto Ē-lī-shā, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to ^m Bēth'-ēl. And Ē-lī-shā said unto him, ° As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, ° I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bēth'-ēl.

3 And ^r the sons of the prophets that were at Bēth'-ēl came forth to Ē-lī-shā, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

"from thy head today" - It was the custom of the pupil to sit at the master's feet (see Deut.33:3; Acts 22:3), as indeed later on, the sons of the prophets sat at the feet of Elisha (2 Kings 4:38). The Hebrew expression here literally means "from over thy head". With the pupil seated at the master's feet, the master would be speaking directly over the top of his student's head. The expression is also used to indicate the dependence of the one who was sitting beneath the master's head (see Gen.40:13; 1 Sam.28:2).

"Yea, I know it" - Both the RSV and Rotherham render this "I also know". There was a note of impatience in Elisha's voice as he recognised in the enquiry of the sons of the prophets what seemed to be a trace of envy at Elisha's close affinity with Elijah the prophet from Gilead.

"hold ye your peace" - One word in the Hebrew, "hehusha", and is equivalent to the English "hush"! It seemed the matter was too painful for Elisha to discuss.

v4. "Yahweh has sent me to Jericho" - "Jericho" means "fragrance" or perhaps "city of the moon", but it became known as "the City of Palms" (Deut.34:3; 2 Chron. 28:15; Judg.1:16). The sub-tropical climate of this area was most conducive to the growth of the tall palm tree. Jericho was situated in the midst of a hostile and barren wilderness on the narrow plains separating the Judean mountains and the jungle of the Jordan Valley, yet because of the springs in this particular

4 And E-lī-jāh said unto him, E-lī-shā, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to ^r Jēr'-i-chō. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jēr'-i-chō.

5 And the sons of the prophets that were at Jēr'-i-chō came to Ē-lī-shā, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

area it had been converted into an oasis and is noted in the Scriptures as a very pleasant place to live (2 Kings 2:19).

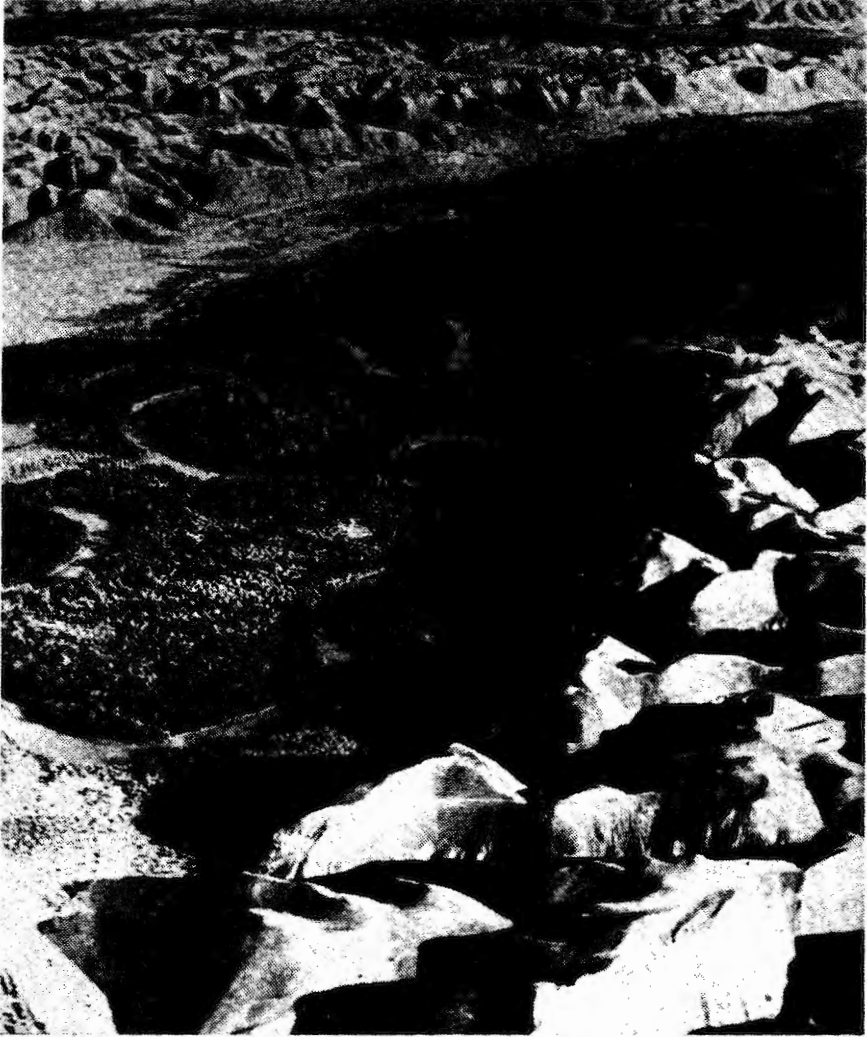
v5. "the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho" - The news of the coming departure of Elijah was apparently revealed to the groups of the sons of the prophets who evidenced some impatience with Elisha as he persisted in following the old prophet down to the banks of Jordan.

v6. "Yahweh hath sent me to Jordan" - The situation of Jordan and the meaning of its name have a particular significance to the story which is now about to unfold. The River Jordan has its source in the snow-covered slopes of Mount Hermon, some 9,000 ft. above sea level and part of the Anti-Lebanon Range. Pure streams running

down the mountains group together at their base and form the source of Jordan which then descends (as its name signifies) rapidly to the Dead Sea, 1,390 feet below sea level. At the southern end of the Sea of Galilee the river is already 635 feet below sea level, yet from Galilee to the Dead Sea, a distance of 60 miles, the level drops to 1,390 feet below the sea! However, because of the serpentine course which the river travels, the length of the Jordan from Galilee to the Dead Sea is something like 200 miles. Originally the area surrounding the lower Jordan valley was like "the garden of Yahweh" (Gen.13:10). Unlike the original Eden, however, this neighbourhood was polluted by the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yahweh blasted those two cities from the face of the earth and desecrated the whole region rendering it sterile and barren as it is today. From that point on this particular region of Jordan became a symbol of all that was unclean and of that which divides from the righteousness of Yahweh. This lesson of Jordan is graphically portrayed in Joshua chapters 3 and 4, when Israel crossed this barrier before they entered into the Promised Land. As the priests went two thousand paces before Israel and their feet stood firm in the river, so the waters were driven backwards, enabling the people to pass over on dry land (Josh.4:3). The waters of Jordan were cut off (Josh. 4:7) by the action of the priests standing in that water. It is noted that, as the water made its way down from the north into the Dead Sea, it passed through a city named Adam (Josh.3:16). Here then is "the Descender", originating clear and fresh from the snows of Hermon and then descending rapidly, its turbulent waters stirring up mire and dirt and gathering every type of particle until finally absorbed into the sea of death in which strong concentrations of chemicals kill every form and vestige of life. The waters had passed, through Adam, from life unto



Jericho, city of palms, still depends on its springs; the mound of ancient Jericho (with the white hut) rises behind.



Floor of the Jordan Valley with the river meandering over the scrub-covered valley bottom. Israelis have removed the scrub in recent years and crops now grow here.

death. The River Jordan was, therefore, an apt symbol of the progress of mortality which terminates in the grave.

6 And E-li'-jäh said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jör'-dän. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy sou! liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.

Jeremiah the prophet speaks about "the swelling of Jordan" - the Hebrew word here indicating "pride" (Jer.12:5; 49:19, see also Zech.11:3). The reference to "the pride of Jordan" is to the greenery which grows on the river bank, and which can be seen from

the heights of both Moab and Judea as one looks down upon this valley. The tops of the brush, lush green in colour, are very deceptive as to what lies beneath; for beneath the green topping of the bracken there lies black, oozy mud, where vipers slither and wild boars abound. The whole region was also a notable habitat of the ferocious lion (Zech.11:3).

The depressed valley of the Jordan became typical of the life in the flesh which every man must face, and cross before he enters into the Promised Land of God's glory. It was fitting then that this region should witness the baptism of the greatest of all Adam's race, even the Son of God himself, who stood in the muddy waters of Jordan to "fulfil all righteousness" and confirm the preaching of John that "all flesh is grass" (Matt.3:6; Isa.40:6).

v7. "*fifty men of the sons of the prophets*" - The Hebrew word for "men" is the word "ish" which is very often used for "important men" cp. v16 where they are styled "men of strength" (margin). It would seem from the record that these also wished to lay claim to be the successors of Elijah and so be invested with his authority.

7 And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jör'-dän.

"to view afar off" - Hebrew "over against them", i.e. in the sight of Elijah and Elisha as very keen spectators as to what was to be transacted.

"*they two stood by Jordan*" - The divine test was to be in the division of the river. He who could turn this river was truly Yahweh's representative, as he who can overcome the flesh, and represent God as the voice crying in the wilderness, is the one who truly represents the Creator.

Hundreds of years later saw two others standing on the banks of Jordan. One of those bore a striking resemblance to Elijah in the manner of his clothing! Such was the poverty and isolation of his circumstances that he claimed to be a "nobody" and as such became an excellent medium for "the voice (of Yahweh) crying in the wilderness" (John 1:19-23). Men of his type, with little or nothing to speak about self, have much more time and greater inclination to talk about God!

This one too, was about to depart from this life, alas in a much sadder way than did Elijah. John died as a consequence of a storm of human passions.

Whether the other one with him resembled Elisha we know not, but we do know

the mantle of manifestation fitted him perfectly! When he stepped into the waters of Jordan they did not separate; instead heaven opened and proclaimed him to be the only one capable of reversing the stream of mortality, now running strongly through Adam to the stagnation of the grave.

The two men standing here on the lip of Jordan were casting long shadows forward. As those shadows materialised again at the other end of history, all those former two had struggled to maintain, now became possible of fulfilment in the substance of their shadows, through him who came "to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt.3:16).

v8-15 - THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH RESTS ON ELISHA

v8. "*And Elijah took his mantle*" - The Hebrew word "addereth" indicates "ample" and is rendered by the word "goodly", "glory" and is used of the kingly cloak (Jonah 3:6). The Septuagint version has "sheepskins". This mantle was a feature with Elijah (1 Kings 19:13, 19) and also became a symbol of the prophet's office (Zech.13:4).

8 And Ê-li'-jäh took ^a his mantle, and wrapped *it* together, and smote the waters, and ^b they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

"*wrapped it together*" - The Hebrew word occurs only here and means "to fold" and from the same root comes the phrase "substance, yet being unperfect" (Psa.139:16). In this particular reference it speaks of the wrapping up of the babe in the womb indicating that which is tightly wrapped up.

The RSV renders it "rolled it up". In this final drama, as Elijah is taken up from Elisha, it would seem that by this act of tightly wrapping up his mantle, a symbol of the prophet's office, that Elijah had not yet appreciated that others would become Yahweh's representative and would wear the mantle of the prophet's office to carry on Yahweh's work in the earth.

"*they were divided hither and thither so that they two went over on dry ground*" - This is the language of the Exodus (Ex.14:21-22, also Josh.3:17), but here Elijah goes in the opposite direction, from the Promised Land, through Jordan towards Gilead from where he had come.

v9. "*a double portion of thy spirit be upon me*" - Literally "a mouth or two" from a custom of giving the honoured guests a double or greater serve (cp.Gen.43:34). The expression is used in the law of the firstborn (Deut.21:17) and therefore, indicates the motive behind Elisha's request. Elisha did not request that he should have twice as much as anyone else of Elijah's spirit and power; what he did request was that he could have the privilege and honour of being the one through whom the work of Elijah would be forwarded, and that he be the spiritual head of those people that Elijah had helped to form into the Schools of the Prophets (see Psa.89:27. Compare also 1 Tim.3:1).

v10. "*Thou hast asked a hard thing*" - This giving of the double portion of the spirit of Elijah was a divine prerogative and yet Elijah had been told at Sinai that Elisha would succeed him in his office (1 Kings 19:16). He therefore, should have acceded to Elisha's request.



Elijah parts the Jordan with his mantle.

“if thou see me when I am taken up” - Elisha’s success now rested in the hands of God; his eye of faith must be firmly fixed upon the prophet of Gilead as he was taken up from him, that his desire may be fulfilled to succeed him in his office.

v11. *“they still went on and talked”* - The Hebrew expression is literally, “walking and walking and talking”. How can two walk together except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3).

“a chariot of fire and horses of fire” - These were the symbols of divine power and protection (cf. 6:17). The word “chariot”, the Hebrew “*racav*”, is the same from whence the word “cherubim” is derived which means “to ride”. From this we get the expression in the Scriptures “the chariots of the cherubim” (1 Chron.28: 18). Whatever else the cherubim may symbolise, and they certainly do have a wonderful application to the saints in glory, the primary significance of the cherubim was that expressed in Genesis when it is said that they “kept the way of the tree of



ELISHA SEES A CHARIOT OF FIRE AND HORSES OF FIRE

life" (Gen.3:24). They were therefore, those symbolic creatures who ensured, not that the way would be blocked, but that it would be kept open so that all that approached the Deity would do so in accordance with the divine etiquette of worship. Although the chariots of heaven would be manifest at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with power and with great destruction (Isa.66:15-16) they will still be known as "the chariots of salvation" (Hab.3:8, see also Psa.68:17). Though they will destroy, yet it will always be to the end that the way to the tree of life might be kept open for all those who want to be saved.

9 ¶ And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that E-li'-jäh said unto E-li'-shä, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And E-li'-shä said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

10 And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and E-li'-jäh went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

v11. "parted them both asunder" - It is important to note what the chariots of heaven did. They divided Elisha from Elijah and after they had successfully separated the two men, we read that Elijah was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind (cp. 1 with this verse). What then happened to the chariots? In subsequent history we learn that they remained with Elisha as a symbolic manifestation that Yahweh's power and defence was now with him. Yahweh's work in the earth, as the God of the cherubim keeping the way of the tree of life open, was far from finished, and would be carried on through Elisha.

We learn this from the later incident when

the Syrian armies encompassed the city of Dothan intent upon capturing Elisha. On that occasion the young servant of Elisha was greatly alarmed when he saw the dire extremity in which they found themselves but Elisha remained calm, for his eyes were still open, as when he watched Elijah depart into heaven above. 2 Kings 6:17 records that when the eyes of the young man were opened "he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha". Thus we see that the chariots never left the earth but they were encircling Elisha, the hub of that cycle, indicating that he was now carrying on the work that had been left by Elijah from the day when he was taken up by God into heaven.

"by a whirlwind" - The word indicates "a storm cloud". Truly Elijah had come into the land of Israel as a storm and had blown through that land in a besom of destruction. He was now taken out in the way that he came; God indicating that Elijah's present work was now complete and that when he should reappear upon the earth, it would be for the work of rebuilding and not destroying.

v12. "Elisha saw it" - Literally "Elisha was seeing and shouting"; in other words the conditions whereby the Spirit would rest upon him were now fulfilled (see v10).

"My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof" - Elijah had been the spiritual father of the sons of the prophets (see 1 Sam.10:12, cp. 1 Cor.4:15). As the chariot of Israel he had been the one in whom Yahweh rode for the protection and the judgment of the nation. And as the horsemen thereof he had endeavoured to guide that nation into divine ways. Yet still Ahab accused him of

being the troubler of Israel (1 Kings 18:17).

When the time came for Elisha to be taken in the article of death, he too was accorded this same title "of the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" because he had indeed fulfilled the mission for which he was called (2 Kings 13:14).

12 ¶ And E-li'-shā saw it, and he cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Īś-rā-ēl, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

"*saw him no more*" - Rotherham has "when he could see him no longer". In other words Elisha gazed after Elijah as long as it was possible for the human eye to see him.

"*and rent them in two pieces*" - This is a dramatic expression of his deep sorrow at the loss of his beloved friend (1 Kings 21: 27).

v13. "*He took up also the mantle of Elijah:*" - Elisha now picks up the badge of the office of the prophet, even though after this incident he does not seem to have used it, but is rather known by the use of his own staff (2 Kings 4:29).

"*that fell from him*" - Elijah had carefully and strongly rolled this mantle together as if the work of God would cease with his departure. It seems providential that this garment fell from him rather than he deliberately dropped it. Thus Yahweh indicated that the work of the Truth was not dependent upon any particular individual and that God, whilst He removes His workmen, also makes provision for the continuance of His work in the earth, which can never be extinguished.

"*bank of Jordan*" - Note the marginal alternative here; Hebrew "lip".

v14. "*Where is Yahweh Elohim of Elijah?*" - The question before Elisha and the nation is, has Yahweh left the earth with His prophet? The expression here used is not an expression of doubt but an expression of faithful anticipation of the divine involvement in the affairs of men. For the use of this expression in this way see Jer.2:6-8.

"*when he also had smitten the waters*" - An extremely important principle emerges from the performance of this miracle in the hands of Elisha. Three great men are recorded in the Scriptures as being individually magnified in the eyes of their contemporaries through the crossing or coming up out of the waters of Jordan. In each case the history of the times was crucial and the names of the men so involved mean basically the same thing. The first of these men to be magnified by crossing Jordan was Joshua, the incident being recorded in the 3rd chapter of Joshua and to which reference has already been made. We read in the 7th verse of that chapter "*And Yahweh said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel*". As a consequence of Joshua being able to cross the river Jordan through the interference of Yahweh in the laws of nature, it is also said, in v10, "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you". Thus Joshua was magnified before the eyes of all Israel in the fact of his leading the people through the divided Jordan. Joshua's name means, "*Yahweh will save*" ("Yahoshua").

13 He took up also the mantle of Ē-li'-jäh that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jôr'-dän;

14 And he took the mantle of Ē-li'-jäh that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Ē-li'-jäh? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Ē-li'-shä went over.

Elisha was the second of these great men to be so magnified before the watching sons of the prophets as he too divided the waters of Jordan. By this means they recognized that he was the true successor of Elijah, appointed by Yahweh to carry on the work. His name means, "*God is salvation*".

Without all contradiction the greatest of the three to be so magnified was the Lord Jesus

Christ, who came down to Jordan that he might both enter in and arise from that river to declare God's righteousness. Before the gazing eyes of all those who had gathered on the banks of Jordan to hear the words of the fiery preacher in the wilderness of Judea, God magnified His Son when the Holy Spirit settled upon him in the shape of the dove and the voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt.3:17)! It is of the height of significance that this statement was not made until Jesus, when he was baptized, "went up straightway out of the water". Thus another great man, the greatest of all, was magnified before the people by coming through the waters of Jordan. Jesus, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Joshua", meaning, "*Yahweh will save*"!

What was the point then in the amazing coincidence of the magnification of these three men, with names of the same meaning, on the banks of the river Jordan? Was it not the fact that he who would be "the salvation of Yahweh" in the ultimate sense is one that must in himself conquer the power of flesh as it flows from Adam into the corrupting sea of death? Was it not that he who was the great High Priest of our profession, by standing in the waters of that muddy stream of mortality, might cause the waters to flow back and thus open up a way to life for all those who would follow in his footsteps? If through the magnification of Joshua the people would understand that the living God was at work among them and if through the work of Elisha Israel were to understand that the chariots and horsemen of God were still at work keeping open the way of the tree of life, then it could be said of the Lord of life himself, not only that he was God's only begotten Son in whom He was well-pleased, but that through him the people would see a manifestation of the living God as they had never seen before, and through him also there would be opened up once and for all that way which would lead to the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev.2:7).

15 And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jër'-i-chō saw him, they said, The spirit of Ē-li'-jäh doth rest on Ē-li'-shä. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

v15. "*The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha*" - This is the same spirit in which John the Baptist came (Luke 1:17) and he also baptized on the banks of Jordan! After this incident the sons of the prophets humbly acknowledged Elisha as Yahweh's true representative and from this point onwards he

was accepted as their head.

In this phrase the word "rest" comes from the Hebrew word "to settle down" and is used of birds coming to rest as they settle upon the earth (2 Sam.21:10). The

word is also used in Isa.11:2 for the spirit of Yahweh that would rest upon the Messiah. In the case of the Lord Jesus Christ it was in the bodily shape of a dove, the very symbol of peace which Matthew records was "lighting upon him" (Matt.3:16). Jesus then was magnified before the people as the Son of God, the prince of peace, who would exercise the power of Yahweh's spirit in not destroying men's lives but in saving them.



*Disciples fall down before Elisha after he parts
the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah.*

"bowed themselves to the ground" - From now on the sons of the prophets address him as "adon" (v19), "my ruler", and take up their position sitting at his feet (4:38).

v16-18 - THE FUTILE SEARCH FOR ELIJAH

v16. *"Behold now"* - Though the sons of the prophets would have seen Elisha divide the river Jordan the inference is that they had not seen the ascension of Elijah (cf. v10-11), and consequently were left in doubt as to where that great prophet had gone.

16 ¶ And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send.

17 And when they urged him "till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not.

18 And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jer'-i-chō,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?

"fifty strong men" - Note the margin, Heb. "sons of strength".

"seek thy master" - Hebrew word here is "adon" as in v3 and v5. Later they applied this same title to Elisha (v19, 6:5, 15).

"the spirit of Yahweh" - Previously Obadiah had expressed the opinion that Yahweh's spirit had moved Elijah capriciously (1 Kings 18:12). The sons of the prophets had yet to appreciate that Yahweh's spirit is not operative unless there is some definite purpose to be served.

"cast him upon some mountain" - Note the margin, Heb. "one of the mountains". Perhaps they thought that Elijah had been buried out of sight as was the case with Moses (cf. Deut.34:6). Curiously the Septuagint version has rendered this also by the words "into the Jordan". Whatever was in their minds, it indicates a complete lack of understanding as to the purpose of the Spirit of Yahweh.

"ye shall not send" - Elisha is very emphatic.

v17. *"they urged him"* - Hebrew word indicates "to peck at"; they continued in their stubbornness.

"till he was ashamed" - That is he became aggravated and embarrassed by their persistence, and so he gave them leave lest his repeated denials be interpreted as a contempt for them, and a cover up for his own false claims.

"he said, Send" - Note the very abrupt manner in which Elisha dismisses them.

"three days" - Significantly they discovered within three days two things:

- (1) that Elijah had indeed truly departed, and
- (2) that his "spirit" lived on in Elisha.

What was seen there in these two men was later recognised in one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though proven dead and placed into a tomb which was sealed by the instigation of the high priest himself, yet after three days it was proven that the same had risen from the dead, and the work of God in him was then to be continued through the apostles.

v18. *"he tarried at Jericho"* - Hebrew was the sense of "abiding", "to sit still". It was a mark of Elisha's utter disinterest in their search (cf. 2 Sam.11:1).

"Did I not say unto you" - Hebrew "command". Elisha now asserts his authority.

"Go not" - The Hebrew word is imperative. Elisha speaks with authority, his word is that of the Spirit of Yahweh.

CHAPTER ELEVEN — “BEHOLD I WILL SEND YOU ELIJAH THE PROPHET”

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

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”.

Malachi 4:5-6

Elijah was removed from the scene in a similar fashion to that in which he came - in a dramatic display of divine activity. As a testimony to the wickedness of the house of Ahab he had by his word scorched the earth with a severe famine. The messengers of the king Ahaziah had been reduced to ashes under the soles of his feet! Wherever his presence or influence had been felt he had left behind an indelible impression upon the nation; doubtless many would have trembled about the thought of his re-appearance.

Yet re-appear he will!

His mission was to turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers but as he became enveloped in the whirlwind he must have despaired that Israel would ever “turn back again.”

There are many conjectures as to where he was taken and how long he lived after his departure but these notes will not add to these discussions for there are more profitable matters to consider. The question as to whether Elijah lived on after his ascent is not nearly as important as the certain fact that he will live again!

The very last promise of the Old Testament is that Elijah will return to complete the work he commenced with Israel. Yahweh’s ‘messenger’, Malachi, has left a message of Elijah’s return that has become embedded in the traditions of Israel; “why say the scribes that Elijah must first come?” (Mark 9:11) Their interpretation of the passage in Malachi was endorsed by the very One whom Elijah will come to announce. “Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things” (Mark 9:12).

There are some who consider this return of Elijah to Israel as unnatural or unlikely and believe that Jesus was only making reference to John the Baptist and that he applied the passage from Malachi entirely to him. This they deduce from the words of Christ, “But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him” (Mark 9:13). From this the disciples also deduced that Jesus spoke of John the Baptist; they also were not wrong for Jesus indeed spoke of *both* men.

John came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Yet it is recorded of him that he “did no miracle” (John 10:41). Where then is his ‘power’? It lay in his role as “the voice”, small but powerful! (cp. John 1:23). As to his ‘spirit’ its charac-

ter was revealed to the two Sons of Thunder, who, wanting to repeat Elijah's scorching judgments, this time on Samaritans, were firmly reminded of which spirit they were: "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56). It is here when the Son of Thunder learns "the *thought* that breathes and *word* that burns."

When Matthew records the comments of Jesus upon the passage in Malachi he writes "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matt.11:14-15). Obviously the Lord's words were not to be taken at surface level: John's work was in the spirit of Elijah. He too, came to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (Luke 1:17). In this he was certainly not without some success but it could hardly be said that he 'restored all things' (cp. Mark 9:12). John himself settled the question when he was asked if he was the promised Elijah. "I am not," he firmly stated (John 1:21).

That Elijah will come to precede the Messiah is, therefore, Scripturally indisputable and so also is the *reason why* he 'must come'. No other man was prepared in the way that he was for the particular task that is specified for him. Malachi's prophecy of his coming is linked with an exhortation to "remember ye the Law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (Mal.4:4). Who better to remember what the Law of Horeb was about than he, Elijah, who was educated on the spot? Indeed, all his previous experiences with the nation, be they in triumph or tragedy were calculated to impress him with the power of a still small voice as against the weakness of naked power. Had not the small voice of Truth quenched the thirst of the widow woman, languishing in the drought of idolatry, whilst his calling of power and flame from heaven had failed to extricate Israel from the mire of iniquity in which they were bound.

With the hand of Yahweh strong upon him, the great prophet had sped over the brown earth of Israel's wheat-bowl, going before the charging chariot of the king. Exalted in spirit, shaggy mane blowing in the wind, he raced down the valley to announce that hearts had been turned and that a new era had dawned. Such high hopes crashed heavily on the gates of Jezreel, behind which the imperious queen fired her verbal thunderbolts at him. These sent the prophet racing in a different direction, now depressed in spirit, to collapse beneath the wilting desert tree wishing that he were dead!

They had done unto him whatsoever they listed!

John followed the inevitable course of this enacted parable and was finally incarcerated and slain through the schemes of another 'Jezebel', Herodias, the supposed wife of Herod Antipas (Mark 6:17-27).

Among those born among women there had not risen a greater than John; so testifies the one who knew all men (Matt.11:11). If this could be said of the one who came to announce the day of Messiah's humiliation, what will be said of him that comes to announce to Judah, "Behold your God!" (Isa.40:9)

Paul asks, "Wot ye not what the scripture saith in Elias?" (Rom.11:2 - margin).

He continues, "how he maketh intercession to God *against* Israel. And Yahweh answered him in kind, for as he had sought God's hand against Israel in fierce judgments so God presented him with a nerve-shattering display of divine power. Elijah must have been breathless and awe-struck when finally there came the comforting "still small voice", containing restorative, Spirit power. With face veiled in his mantle, yet with ears to hear, the prophet was to learn the lesson of his life. The hearts of men and women turn under the consistent persuasion of spiritual words but they will steadfastly resist all attempts to move them by force. Elijah will come back to echo the voice he heard on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion upon Horeb. John was "a voice", crying in the wilderness and Elijah will come in 'the spirit and power' of John and speak 'to the heart of Jerusalem' (Isa.40:2, margin). And they will turn!

Elijah will be strengthened in his conviction of the power of that Voice, for evidence has it that it "turned" his own heart! Did he not request at Sinai that there should be a "great and dreadful day of Yahweh", that opportunity might be afforded the Creator of Israel "to smite the earth with a curse"? But Malachi says he shall return "*before*" the great and dreadful day, so that opportunity might be provided for hearts to turn under the influence of the voice, "*test*" Yahweh, in the person of His Son, should smite the earth with a curse! (Mal.4:4-6).

Leading the tribes into "the wilderness of the people", for a vastly different motive than that for which he went there himself, he will yet see Yahweh "purge out the rebels" (Ezek.20:33-38). Passing Yahweh's sheep "under the rod" (v37), he will assure that none is lost but the sons of perdition; the rest will he bring to the "Great Shepherd" who shall "carry them in his bosom" (Isa.40:11). In a word Elijah will lead that Second Exodus when "Yahweh shall set his hand the second time to recover the remnant of His people ..." (Isa.11:11). For this reason we believe he appeared with two other men, greatly interested in this future work, for a discussion of the subject of "Exodus" (Luke 9:30-31, "decease" = Gk. "Exodos", only other use, Heb.11:22). Whether he actually appeared in person can remain unanswered in these notes although visions often involved real people, and the transfigured Lord was certainly real enough! But if the personal involvement of Elijah in the transfiguration would do violence to our understanding of principles, then there is still a lesson here 'written altogether for our sakes.'

What could have been more fitting than these three men discussing the subject of "Exodus"! For Israel, Moses had led the first and Elijah will lead the second. For the whole world of mankind, Jesus has led the greatest of all. Baptized into Moses, Israel had been led out of the "house of bondage" into the freedom of the Land of Promise. Behind the glorified prophet from Gilead, Israel will move up the Valley of Achor and "the door of hope" will swing open to them as they proclaim "My God is Yahweh". But for men and women of all nationalities, who are identified with the "greater than Moses", yes, and the greater than Elijah too, it will not only mean emancipation from captivity, but to see "captivity led captive" (Eph.4:8). This was a task beyond Moses and Elijah!

Peter, overawed by the occasion of the transfiguration, would have pitched three

tabernacles, thus equating the three great leaders. How mistaken this lovable fisherman was! As the cloud came and went and Moses and Elijah dissipated with it, he was left with the one who was "the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man" (Heb.8:2). In that Heavenly Tent dwelt all the fulness of God morally and the God-breathed Word of living ideals found a practical expression in a life, lived in a body substantially the same as our own. It was not necessary to build three more tabernacles, but to listen attentively to the voice emanating from within the one already pitched by God. "This is my beloved Son; hear him" (Luke 9:35).

Thoroughly prepared, "Elijah truly shall first come and restore all things" (Matt. 17:11). With the risen Lord still with them, this remained the burning question; "Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) It was certainly not the hour for Israel's kingdom but the "times and the seasons" tell modern disciples that the day is not far distant. Then the great trumpet shall be blown and they that were "ready to perish" (Isa.27:13) will be ready to learn the spirit of the Law from whence that phrase was taken. "And thou shalt speak and say before Yahweh thy God, 'A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty and populous ...'" (Deut.26:5). Jacob's own experience lay enshrined in the Law and in the most remarkable manner it foreshadowed the history of the nation that came from him. "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I *come again to my father's house in peace*, then shall Yahweh be my God" (i.e. "Elijah" - Gen.28:20-21). Jacob truly was ready to perish in the house of Laban the Syrian but after human ingenuity had been exhausted, the angel of Yahweh helped him saying "return unto the land of thy kindred" (Gen.31:13). To commemorate his determination in this purpose Jacob erected a monument of stones and called it "Gilead" (Gen.31:47). Another "monument" of Gilead will lead "the sons of Jacob" home to repeat the words of their father and to prove that the heart of the children is turned to their fathers (Micah 7:14-15, 20).

Hearts softened by the influence of "the still small voice" are ready to receive "the implanted Word" and to produce "the fruits of righteousness" (James 1:21; 3:17-18). Thus in their repentant condition, Yahweh will "Sow the house of Israel" and "rain righteousness upon them" (Hos.10:12). According to Jeremiah's prophecy, among the things sown in Israel, will be the "New Covenant", the fruits of which are the forgiveness of their sins (Jer.31:34). This must surely mean a confrontation with their Messiah, for who can forgive sins but God only, and through whom did he become related to the race to achieve this grand objective? The disobedient children will come to see the wisdom of their fathers, who were justified by their faith in The Seed promised.

Seed planted will only produce after its kind. That which is to be planted in Israel is God's seed and, therefore, must produce a God-likeness. So the prophet says ... "I will put my Law in their inward parts.....and will be their God and they shall be my people" (v33). Such an intimate relationship is also expressed in another figure, that of a husband and wife (v32 margin). Thus Israel sown with the seed of God, will spring into life and "blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa.27:6).

So God sows, or, as expressed in a word, "Jezreel". "Great shall be the day of Jezreel", says the prophet Hosea (1:11). Hosea may not have been speaking of the valley of that name, but there is more than one echo of the life of Elijah in the prophet's words where his subject matter is that of the Second Exodus! In a poignant drama Hosea sees Israel "allured" into the wilderness, not to be smitten with a curse, but in the quiet solitude to have God "speak to her heart" (2:14 margin; cp. Isa.40:2 concerning John Baptist). It will be the comforting work of speaking to humbled Israel with the still small voice.

The prophet goes on to say "And I will give her vineyards from thence." Naboth lost his vineyard when he was violently wrenched out of his inheritance and slain by wicked hands. Israel lost their inheritance, symbolised by the vineyard, when by wicked hands they slew the blameless Son of 'the Lord of the vineyard'. As Jesus expressed it, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men and will let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt.21:40-41). Nevertheless Hosea's words indicate that Israel will be humbled and purified, to reveal a faithful spirit like Naboth the true Jezreelite and enter with him into a stable and peaceful inheritance in the vicinity of the house of the King.

In that day Israel shall learn to distinguish their God, Yahweh, from the vain deities of the heathen; they will not confuse the Creator with "Baali", as they did on Mount Carmel (Hos.2:16). They will never again "halt between two opinions". Then the marriage will take place. Yahweh says that Israel will call Him "Ishi", "my Husband" (margin). Such a marriage will be upon the very highest principles; "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. And I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and *thou shalt know that I am Yahweh.*" (Hos.2:19, 20). The work of 'Elijah' will have reached a glorious triumphant climax!

What a glorious contrast this picture presents when compared to the marriage of Church and State, Jezebel and Ahab, in the days of Elijah!

Productivity of the field is a result of the union of heaven and earth. Fertile earth exposed to the elements of heaven are a dynamic combination, capable of the most prolific results. This is Hosea's next picture and it springs out of the meaning of the name of the prophet's first-begotten son, Jezreel (1:4-8). Yahweh in the heaven of heavens hears the pleading voice of the earth crying to the heavens for fulfilment and fertility just as it did in the three and a half years of Elijah's drought (Hos. 2:21). In response Yahweh promises to sow to them, Israel, in righteousness, a message of fruitfulness and blessing, a message conveyed ultimately through *His* only begotten Son; and they shall hear "God sows"! (Hos.2:22)

Such a figure, an earth appealing for the blessings of heaven, was personalised on Carmel. There was Elijah, mantled in earth's products, forehead touching the ground, and heart reaching unto heaven. He was at once earth's mediator and heaven's representative. "There shall not be dew nor rain but according unto my word". And Yahweh heard, and the answer Elijah heard, "the sound of an abundance of rain"! Truly, "great shall be the day of Jezreel"! (Hos.1:11)

Both Testaments close with a promise of second advent. "Behold I send you Elijah the prophet" (Mal.4:5). "Behold I come quickly" (Rev.22:12). If Elijah "must first come" for Israel, then the Lord Jesus must first come for Elijah.

"Even so come Lord Jesus, for we long for the day of thy appearing and the manifestation in the earth of those who wandered in sheepskins and goat skins of whom the world was not worthy."

We are deeply humbled, surely brethren and sisters, to learn the amazing promise that they without us shall not be made perfect." (Heb.11:36-40).

J.M. March, 1978.