

1ST KINGS

Week 30, Chapters 18 and 19

The story of Elijah is about his mission as a prophet of God NOT to all Israel, per se, but primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel; the kingdom that by now is beginning to be known by the name Ephraim, the largest and most dominant tribe of the north. Judah, the southern kingdom, is still being ruled by King Asa, the Temple priesthood is still intact, the Jerusalem Temple is still in operation, and relatively speaking they are staying true to Yehoveh.

King **Achav** and his foreign wife Jezebel rule the northern kingdom of 10 tribes and have led their citizens into idol worship and have abandoned Yehoveh worship. The people are barred from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem; they cannot sacrifice at Solomon's Temple, they cannot join with their brethren to celebrate the God-ordained Biblical feasts and appointed times. Since it is the priesthood that is charged with teaching the Hebrew people the ways of God and His Torah, the 10 tribes now faint for the lack of knowledge. Instead the people of the north are a captive audience to blasphemous teachings from the King, the Queen, and the prophets of Ba'al and Ashtoreth.

Yet there was still a memory of the true God of Israel among the people of the north, and at least scant knowledge of God's Word, enough to know that all wasn't right. Because the Kings and the false priests and prophets of the north insisted on teaching the people wrongly, God went around them and directly to the people. **Eliyahu** was the Lord's courageous and tireless messenger bringing both warning and instruction.

In 1st Kings 18 we left off last time as **Eliyahu** stood on a slope of Mt. Carmel before a large gathering of clan and tribal leaders, no doubt many elders, and also 450 prophets of Ba'al. He was making it clear to all present that this last many years of their trying to stand in two camps, the camp of Ba'al and the camp of Yehoveh, was a vein and foolish effort and that God would suffer it no longer. Choose, said Elijah, choose Ba'al or choose Yehoveh.

A test designed to demonstrate to the people that Ba'al was a sham and the prophets of Ba'al were but scam artists involved two sacrificial bulls that would be offered on two separate sacrificial altars: one dedicated to Ba'al the other to the God of Israel. Ba'al's prophets were allowed to choose which of the bulls they preferred. However Elijah then issued a challenge: don't light the wood of the altar on fire as usual. Call upon Ba'al to light the fire supernaturally.

The prophets of Ba'al took up the challenge and from morning until late afternoon, they danced, shouted, jumped and down, chanted, cut themselves with knives and performed all manner of nonsense and of course nothing happened. Earlier in the day, around noon, Elijah began to insult them and their fake god with sarcasm; finally as the usual time for the evening prayers arrived he put a stop to the spectacle and called the people to now turn their attention from the fraudulent spiritualism consisting only of sound and fury that they had been witnessing, to himself.

Let's re-read part of 1st Kings 18.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS 18: 30 – end

Verse 30 has ***Eliyah*** speaking the simplest of truths to the people; a truth that is also an invitation: "come here to me". It is an invitation that God offers His people when they need to repent, and it is also an invitation to become one of His people for those who have never been. "Come here to me".

The scene on Mt. Carmel, accompanied with Elijah's words first demanding that the people choose, and now inviting them to "come to me", are reminiscent of a scene described to us by the Apostle John in his Book of Revelation. The first 3 chapters of the Book of Revelation are of a vision of John in which Messiah Yeshua spoke a message of warning and instruction to the so-called 7 churches of Asia. We'll look briefly at a few verses. And I'll tell you up front that the reason I want to do this is because Christians have a tendency to distance ourselves from these ancient Hebrews and shake our heads in derision and disapproval at their behavior,

blind to the reality that (at least at this point in history) we are behaving the same way only in a modern Western cultural setting. Thus Elijah's warnings and Christ's warning to God's people are essentially the same.

READ REVELATION 2:18 – end

Remembering that Yeshua's entire message in all 3 beginning chapters of Revelation is ONLY to Believers (in whatever spiritual condition they might be), it is parallel to *Eliyahu's* message being delivered to the 10 northern tribes of God's people in whatever spiritual condition they might be. And notice in Revelation 2:20 the mention of "that Jezebel woman" who claimed to be a prophet but was leading the people astray into all kinds of sin and immorality. The Jezebel woman in this passage is symbolic of the real historical Jezebel we have been reading about. And this Jezebel woman is representative of what I would term "the spirit of Jezebel" (in the same way we speak of the "spirit of Anti-Christ").

What we need to notice is that this congregation of believers is in the midst of divided loyalties. Some believers have one foot in Messiah's camp and the other in Jezebel's, but (as verse 24 states) there are also some believers who have held firmly to the Lord and resisted false teachings from false prophets. Messiah says in verse 22 and 23 that He is going to throw Jezebel into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great trouble UNLESS they turn from their sins. And if they don't turn from their sins all the children produced from this adulterous relationship will be struck dead.

To commit adultery with Jezebel means to enter into an illicit union with her, even though one is already in an exclusive union with Messiah. It is to try to be one with Christ and one with sin and evil simultaneously. The "children" are the result, the bad fruit if you will, that comes from this hellish union. Messiah says that by throwing Jezebel in to the sickbed and destroying her children, this will prove to His followers that not only is He the only One who can search hearts and minds, but also that His followers will receive what their deeds deserve (Christ's words, not mine).

Let's read another passage from Revelation directed to the church.

READ REVELATION 3:14 – 16

Let me repeat: this message is to believers, not to pretenders and not to the world. And the Lord says, CHOOSE! Because right now you're neither hot nor cold, you're somewhere in the middle. And because of this he vomits you out of his mouth.

Notice how these two passages of Revelation are but patterns taken from our narrative of Elijah and his war against Ba'al. The warning to the ancient Hebrews by God through *Eliyahu*, and the same warning made by the **same** God through Messiah directly to us His church is this: we deceive ourselves to think that we can be in union with sin and with Him at the same time. We cannot add paganism to our worship of God and thereby "Christianize" it and deem it holy. We cannot sit on the fence saying "it's all good", because I'm a believer I'm OK, you're OK; we'll serve the world for 6 days and serve God on the 7th day. We can't roll our own personal religion that suites us. And even though we think we can do these things, and that God will accept them, He does not and will not in any time, era, or dispensation. We deceive ourselves to our peril with such a mindset. Understand: Messiah's message in Revelation is not hypothetical. He is addressing the real church as it is and as He sees it. And a church is not buildings or places but rather it is people; it is but an assembly of believers so we are each individually responsible for our choices. Thus at the end of each letter to a particular church, after a warning and instruction has been given, He says: "Let those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the congregation".

So as we continue with studying about Elijah, picture yourself as among the throngs of people at the foot of Mt. Carmel, gathered together by God for the purpose of being admonished and being told to make a black and white choice; a choice that these people really didn't want to make and had avoided up to now.

In verse 30 the people have turned their attention to a broken down altar formerly used to worship YHWH, and Elijah is in process of repairing it so that the remaining bull can be placed upon it. This altar must have been quite ancient and was one of the hundreds that existed throughout the Promised Land before Solomon's Temple was built. There was a long time after the Israelites first crossed the Jordan under Joshua's leadership that they sacrificed only at the Wilderness Tabernacle; but as soon as they spread out into their own designated tribal territories they began building their own family altars. In time the Tabernacle came into complete ruin, and multiple priestly centers were set up, accompanied with their own altars. It was one of these altars to Adonai that had not been used in ages that Elijah was preparing to use.

Elijah gathered 12 stones to represent all 12 tribes of Israel to help rebuild the altar. Notice that he used natural stones and did not alter them. We're even reminded that it was the Lord who changed Jacob's name to Israel, and so the two terms Jacob and Israel became interchangeable (something that often confuses Bible students). But this message is put here to remind everyone that all who count their heritage as having come from Jacob is part of Israel.

Then **Eliyahu** had a sizeable trench dug around the altar, put wood on the altar, and laid the slaughtered bull atop it all. No doubt the tension was building after people had been out there all day long, and had watched the Ba'al prophets completely fail in having their altar fire lit supernaturally. So in addition to the drama of the spectacle, **Eliyahu** order that water be poured all over the altar, the wood, and the bull. Not just a little bit of water, but gallons and gallons. Don't be fooled by what on the surface seems obvious; that the wetting of the wood with water would be all the more impressive when God lit that altar fire.

Notice that 4 jugs of water were used, and they were filled and emptied on the altar 3 times. 4 times 3 is 12. What does the application of water do in the Bible? It cleanses. The symbolism is of the ritual cleansing of all 12 tribes of Israel. The water used was the required living water (**mayim chayim**) as commanded in the Torah for ritual cleansing, and this use of living water was possible since they were next to the Kishon River. Thus the altar and the bull were purified but this was done symbolically in the name of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Let me remind you that while blood is for atonement, it does not cleanse from ritual impurity. And that while living water cleanses from ritual impurity, it does not atone for sins. If one is to be cleansed **and** forgiven for sins, then the use of living water and blood are both required. Thus this is the reason that we are given the crucial information that both blood and water flowed from Yeshua's wounds as He hung on the Cross. Messiah told us on numerous occasions that He was living water, and that He was also the sacrificial lamb who came to pay the price of blood atonement for our sins. No greater proof of truth and literalness of His words could have been offered than what happened at his crucifixion.

Now that all the preparations were made, Eliyahu simply looked heavenward and prayed this as recorded in verse 36: **"Yehoveh, elohim of Avraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are elohim in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word"**. Notice that Elijah said Abraham, Isaac and Israel (not Jacob) because he was stressing the national aspect of Jacob's 12 sons. He went on to pray in verse

37 that the reason for what these people were observing was to turn the people's hearts back to Him. In other words, the goal was not God's wrath but rather His mercy. God wanted the people to repent so that He could offer them forgiveness.

Without yelling, dancing, screaming, or any other human participation fire fell from heaven and not only lit the fire but burned up the bull, the wood, and the altar stones themselves. Every drop of water was instantly evaporated. Everything simply vaporized and disappeared. Elijah prefaced this awesome display by making clear that the people understood that he was no sorcerer, and that it was merely by God's word (God ordering it to happen) that it happened.

The people fell on their faces (as most anyone would do) and repented. They chose as Elijah had earlier told them to choose: if Yehoveh is the god, let him be God of Israel. If Ba'al is the god, then let him be god of Israel. So the people proclaimed, "Yehoveh is God, Yehoveh is God". Immediately Elijah ordered the tribal and clan leaders to seize the 450 prophets of Ba'al. Elijah led them away, down the slope, to the Kishon River and there had them executed. Should he have taken such drastic action as that?

Deut. 17:2-5 CJB

² "If there is found among you, within any of your gates [in any city] that ADONAI your God gives you, a man or woman who does what ADONAI your God sees as wicked, transgressing his covenant

³ by going and serving other gods and worshipping them, the sun, the moon, or anything in the sky- something I have forbidden-

⁴ and it is told to you, or you hear about it; then you are to investigate the matter diligently. If it is true, if it is confirmed that such detestable things are being done in Isra'el;

⁵ then you are to bring the man or woman who has done this wicked thing to your city gates, and stone that man or woman to death.

So the penalty for worshipping other gods is death, and ***Eliyahu*** merely carried out God's

prescribed penalty. Had any of those Ba'al prophets joined the other Israelites in repenting, they would not have been harmed. There is no mention of any doing that. Also notice that it was the teachers of the ways of Ba'al who were executed. I've mentioned on numerous occasions that all that speak and teach on behalf of the Lord are held to a higher standard.

Verse 41 changes the tone. Back in verse 1, Yehoveh said that He would send rain down on the land; that is about to happen. But first the people had to repent and the false teachers and those who led the people into apostasy had to be eliminated. Elijah told Achav to eat and drink. The King had no doubt been fasting as was typical when praying for rain and Eliyahu told him the rains were coming. So as the King ate, Elijah climbed to the summit of Mt. Carmel and bowed down in solemn prayer. He sent his servant (a prophet usually had an assistant with him) to go and look towards the Mediterranean Sea to check if clouds were forming. Six times the servant went, and reported that the skies were clear. But on the 7th time, he said that there was a cloud but that it was tiny. Elijah told the king to get in his chariot and get off the mountain quickly because otherwise the downpour would turn the dust to mud and his chariot would get stuck.

Achav didn't hesitate; and within a short time heavy rain pummeled the area. Interestingly Elijah, an old man, decided to run in front of Achav's chariot all the way to an estate in the Jezreel Valley owned by the royal family. The Lord gave Eliyahu supernatural energy to perform what was in essence a great sign of respect for the king. It is kind of fascinating in that much like David did with King Saul, Elijah was never ordered to depose King Achav and so never tried to. Rather he treated with respect that one wonders if he truly deserved.

The royal estate was about 15 miles from Mt. Carmel. Elijah demonstrated that everything that he had done was never a personal attack on King Achav; it was but him following the Lord's commands obediently, at great personal cost.

Let's move on to chapter 19.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 19: 1 - 8

When Achav arrived at the family estate he went in to tell his wife, Jezebel, all of the miraculous things he had witnessed and how all of Jezebel's prophets of Ba'al were dead at Elijah's order. Let's just say that after hearing his account of Mt. Carmel, Jezebel was not as impressed as was her husband. Her response was to send a threat to Elijah: tomorrow by this time you are a dead man.

As serious as Jezebel was such that she made an oath to seal her threat that invoked the names of her gods Ba'al and Ashtoreth; on the other hand it is obvious that her intent was not to kill Elijah but rather to get him to leave. If she actually wanted to kill him, the last thing she would have done is send a messenger to him announcing her intention! No, his going away better suited the situation. There were now many clan and tribal chiefs who, due to Elijah's faithfulness at Carmel, had renounced Ba'al and resumed worshipping Yehoveh; Elijah was more popular than ever among the people so it would have been political suicide for Jezebel and Achav to have Elijah executed. It worked; **Eliyahu** fled.

He took his servant with him and traveled far south from Carmel, into the Kingdom of Judah, and then went as far south as Judah extended: Be'er Sheva. It would be safe there but he determined to go even further into the desert and so left his servant in Be'er Sheva to go alone. Elijah was despondent, depressed, exhausted, afraid, full of doubts, unsure of his future role as a prophet of Yehoveh.

Historically there are two positions taken by Bible scholars on the meaning of the statement in verse 3 that when Elijah got the Queen's message he fled for his life. The most accepted is that he fled to avoid being killed. He essentially felt so threatened that he abandoned the mission field that was his assignment from God and went into isolation. We find nothing that would imply that the Lord told Elijah to leave and go to the south.

A few Bible scholars, most notably C. F. Kiel, argue that while he used to accept that rationale that he has changed his mind. Kiel says that Elijah went to find solitude that he might pour out his life before God because it seemed as though his mission was over.

Elijah had arrived at a point that he felt everything was at a dead-end. He had fearlessly confounded hundreds of enemy prophets at Mt. Carmel, confronted a King who wanted him dead, had so much faith in the Lord that he spent a year or more depending on wild ravens to

bring him morsels of food as his only sustenance, and demonstrated such unswerving trust in the limitless power and authority of Yehoveh that he confidently prayed over a dead gentile boy and the Lord resurrected his life.

No doubt he must have felt that the Mt. Carmel miracle would lead to a drastic reshaping and restoration of Israel and change of heart by King Achav and Queen Jezebel. Now he could, for a time, rest and bask in God's glory as Israel began its sharp turnaround. But nothing like that happened; instead he was threatened with his life and chased not just out of town but out of the entire northern kingdom. How else could he have felt but that he had somehow failed?

He was so convinced that God must be done with him that he begged God to take his life. He wandered in the desert until he found a retama tree (today known as a Spanish Broom tree) and laid himself down in its meager shade. "It is enough", he cried to the Lord, and then acknowledged that he was no different or better than his ancestors. He was physically, spiritually and emotionally spent and would rather die at Yehoveh's hand than to be killed by the evil Jezebel, because that would seem like an even greater tragedy.

Was the incomparable **Eliyahu** having a massive pity-party? In some ways, yes. But in other ways, no. His problem was that according to his earthly eyes and carnal mind, he had failed. What good had all these years in hiding, his denial of self and any kind of a normal life, and the great risk of taking on the king, queen, and their pagan minions accomplished? All he had intended and dreamed for was now a wreck. Every pastor and Bible teacher implores his charges to see things as God sees them; yet in the end, we are not God. It is only with great effort that we can set aside all the customary earthly measurements of success (the same ones that others use to measure us) and leave it entirely in God's hands. We are, after all, humans. Even Yeshua in a show of his humanness, alone and trembling in stress and anxiety, asked the Father if there was any way to avoid the torturous punishments and death that He foreknew He was but hours away from suffering.

Let me be candid with you; at some time or another nearly everyone who serves the Lord on a near full-time basis finds themselves tired and discouraged. Depending on their role, one can get physically and mentally worn down from the demands that few people know about, find that the great changes that they had hoped would come from their commitment to a church project or goal never materialized; They looked around and saw that suddenly their children were grown and they had missed much of those wonderful times that could never be recovered (so laser-focused were they on their assignment); and for pastors, after years of dedicating every waking hour to their flock, their flock tired of them and wanted a new shepherd. This is why, within the institutional church, the concept of a Sabbatical was borne. To give these men and

women some down time to spend in solitude with the Lord, to pursue something that there simply was no time to do otherwise, to get reacquainted with their families, to get a fresh spiritual perspective and simply to rest.

Is that self-pity? Yes, to a degree, I must confess that it is. But it is not something that I or probably most any other Christian leader or layman would find unreasonable or let alone condemn someone for. Because in the end God's earthly leaders and teachers are people just like the ones they are serving. Flawed and fragile, full of emotions, needs and imperfections. I have the greatest sympathy for Elijah and cannot fault him. And I think the Lord's response to ***Eliyah's*** decision to run away from his mission field shows us how the divine Father both mercifully understands our humanity but also righteously cannot simply overlook such a decision from those He has given such great gifts and responsibility.

We'll continue with chapter 19 next time, and pick up with Elijah sitting in the wilderness, alone, wondering how it has all come to this.